

ROSA LAMBERT

OR

The Memoirs of a Clergyman's Daughter

BY

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ROSA LAMBERT

OR

THE MEMOIRS OF A CLERGYMAN'S DAUGHTER

VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

HORATIO ROCKINGHAM.

THE July evening was glowing and beautiful, as the sun, having well nigh completed his last circle from east to west, was glowing up with a ruddy tinge the eery vapours that were floating on the horizon in which he was ascending. His golden lustre was shed upon the trees, at that time in their fullest foliage—upon the thick hedges which bordered the waysides or separated the emerald meadows: it rested upon the bosom of crystal streamlets; and innumerable insects disported, with blithe humming sounds, in the rays of that brilliant sunset. The birds, whose songs had been faint throughout the intense sultriness of the day, began to warble from the trees and make the hedges musical, as piping forth the heartiest welcome to whomsoever might be passing near their favourite haunts: and thus, as Nature prepared to bathe herself in the evening dew after the fierce glow of the burning hot day, her voices went forth in sweetest melody from every bough. All around,

the evidences of that same Nature's loveliness and wealth were scattered profusely: her floral beauties decked the gardens, the hedges, the meadows, and the very waysides—while in the fields the golden corn already seemed to be growing pale for the approaching harvest.

On this lovely July evening was it that I was returning home to the parsonage, after a lonely ramble through the fields; and the exceeding beauty of the scenery stretching around me partially dispelled the mournful thoughts which had been agitating in my mind during the earlier part of my walk. Still it was impossible that even the aspect of Nature's holiday could create a corresponding holiday in my own heart; and if my soul endeavoured to soar too high above those earthly circumstances of which I had already begun to have a somewhat bitter experience, it drooped down again like the wing-wearied bird from a too aspiring flight. Indeed, how was it possible that I could altogether escape from the painfulness of my reflections?—how could I abandon myself to the unalloyed enjoyment of that charming sunset hour, and to the manifold beauties scattered by

ROSA LAMBERT

✓ Nature's hand in such lavish profusion around? Could I help thinking of my father, naturally of so kind and so benevolent a disposition, and so well fitted by those attributes to fulfil the duties of the village pastor,—but whose kindly heart misfortunes had perverted—who had of late been growing reckless in his actions, slovenly in his person, and intemperate in his habits? Or could I be happy when I thought of that mother whom in mine infancy and girlhood I had known as the most tender and affectionate of beings, but on whom the heavy hand of sickness had of late years rested so heavily—chaining her with the iron bond of paralysis either to her bed or to her easy-chair—marring all the beauty which I had once loved to gaze upon—souring her temper—making her countenance, in its angular peakedness, a sort of reflex of the asperities which had been rising up on her heart? Or again, how could my happiness be unalloyed when I thought of Cyril—my handsome brother—of whom any sister might have been so proud, but whose fine spirit was rapidly becoming chafed, and galled, and impatient under the adverse circumstances which weighed upon our family as if it were a doomed one,—that brother who yearned to escape from the life of unwilling idleness, which he was leading, but who could find neither means nor opportunity to launch himself into any career which would enable him to eat the bread of honest independence? And lastly, was it not natural that I should dread to look into the future on my own account, and that I should tremble for my destiny? At eighteen years of age, with a decent education, though without brilliant

mental accomplishments—but, as my mirror and one or two flattering tongues had told me, endowed with a more than ordinary beauty—I appeared to have no chance of setting comfortably in life by means of a happy marriage. Not a single suitor had as yet offered his hand. The sons of the village were too poor, and also too timid and retiring—perhaps also too prudent—to seek to link their fate with the dowerless gentility of the parson's daughter: while the sons of the wealthy farmers, squires, and noblemen of the neighbourhood, sought for wives in the society in which they moved, and travelled not out of the way to seek a damsel belonging to a family which was seldom invited out to parties because too poor to give them in return. This was mortifying and humiliating enough to the vanity of one who had only to look into the glass to see that she was really beautiful. Moreover, I could conceal from myself that even the few families of the district whom we were wont to visit, had within the last two or three years gradually broken off with us, until they at length looked coldly upon us. I knew that my father's debts had become the talk of the whole neighbourhood: and my cheeks glowed crimson with the reflection that he was accused of meanness, trickeries, and dirty ways, in the obtaining of credit, in bolstering up embarrassments, and in staving off law-process. That he was fast losing the reputation of an honest man and that the scanty of his profession could not serve as a saving clause for his character, I was also but too painfully aware: and that the sins of the sire were being visited upon the children, was likewise a soul-harrowing truth which it was

impossible to shut out from my own convictions.

No wonder therefore was it if, beneath such depressing influences as these, I could not compel my heart to lie completely in the shine of that gorgeous sunset in whose glory all nature was basking and bathing, as I bent my steps homeward from my ramble on that July evening. Though the path which I was pursuing between two flower-bedecked hedgerows, was steeped in golden lustre, yet the pathway of my own existence, when looking forward seemed to lie through dark and sullen vistas. I paused upon the brow of a hill about half a mile from the village, which lay in the valley at my feet. Foliage and verdure stretched up on either side, to the very backs of the houses which formed the one straggling street constituting Hawthorn; for so I choose to denominate that village, having good reasons thus to veil its real name under a fictitious one. Standing a little way detached from the farther extremity of the hamlet itself, was the parsonage-house—a small, shabby-looking dwelling, wanting all kinds of repairs, and seeming to proclaim by its exterior the poverty which was experienced by its inmates. It stood on the verge of the churchyard; and the church itself was embowered in the midst of immense yew-trees; so that even from the eminence on which I had stopped short, only the ancient gray-looking tower of the little edifice could be seen. I could not help heaving a profound sigh as I thought to myself how much peace and happiness might have been enjoyed by us in that beautiful and picturesque village, if my mother's illness had not created such pecuniary difficulties

for my father and if those pecuniary difficulties had not tendered to change his nature, make him indifferent to his own self-respect lead him on to habits of intemperance, and thus peril his character and his position.

That sigh had scarcely ceased to convulse my bosom, when I was suddenly started by the rush of a large New foundland dog dashing past me; but as I instantaneously recognised to whom it belonged, the effeminate yet sweet and melodious voice of its owner sounded in my ears, as it called the animal back. Almost immediately afterwards Mr. Rockingham was by my side. I should observe that this young gentleman—who was about one-and-twenty years of age was the only son of a very rich man who had a country-seat in the neighbourhood, who was the owner of large estates in those parts, and also the patron of the living which my father held. For this living—poor though it were, as it only produced about one hundred and twenty pounds a year, sometimes less and never more—my father was indebted to Mr. Rockingham senior; or Squire Rockingham, as he was generally called. They had been school-fellows in their younger days: then for a long period of time they had lost sight of each other; and when they met again, my father was in poverty, while Mr. Rockingham had amassed an enormous fortune, heaven knows by what slimy and tortuous ways. He was not altogether unmindful of his school boy friendship; and having the little living of Hawthorn in his gift, bestowed it upon my sire.

That gentleman's son was who, with his great Newfoundland dog overtook me in the manner already described. Though I

knew him to be a few weeks past one-and-twenty—as his birthday on attaining his majority had recently been celebrated by a grand festival at Hawtnorn Hall, at which I was present—yet it was difficult to think of him or to treat him otherwise than as a mere innocent youth. He was of an appearance not only delicate, but for one of his age singularly effeminate. Though I myself am not above the medium height of my sex, yet as he stood by my side he was shorter than I, and therefore of very insignificant stature for a man. But his figure was of a remarkable accuracy of proportion; and though so slender of a matchless symmetry. Yet having neither the advantage of imposing height nor of robust development, his form was that of a mere youth, and seemed fitted rather for a round jack than for the fashionably-cut frock-coat which he wore. Nor was his countenance of a manliness which could carry off the slightness of his form or diminish the impression made by the lowness of his stature. He had a complexion as fair as that of a girl, and which many a girl might have envied, in as much as in its feminine pureness it seemed to bid defiance to the browning influence of a July sun. His hair was light and silky, as well as curling naturally and as it was of exceeding luxuriance, it might have been worn so as to flow over his shoulders: but he kept it cut comparatively short, no doubt to diminish as much as possible the effeminacy of his appearance. His eyes were of a soft blue; and their habitual expression was that of mildness: but I had more than once noticed a singular flaming up of those eyes, as if the momentary fierceness of passion

blazing in his soul sent forth that sinister lustre—as the flames of a house on fire are seen to fling their iridescent glow through the windows, and then all in an instant are smothered by the roof falling in. That peculiarity of the eyes I had observed whenever a word was thrown out, in a playful mood, which at all seemed to touch upon the effeminacy of Horace Rockingham; and I myself, presuming on the intimacy which subsisted between the two families—his being almost the only one with which we were still on visiting terms—and also having known him for many years, had frequently treated him as a mere pretty boy, though in perfect innocence of thoughts as well as playfulness of mood—but really forgetting at the time that he was other than what I addressed him as. It was upon such occasions as these that I had seen his eyes suddenly flame up and flash fire, while his really beautiful countenance—for beautiful and not handsome it was—would assume an expression so singular that for an instant it frightened me. Nor was I the only person who thus regarded him as a pretty boy: all his acquaintances, male and female treated him in the same manner. No one would even give him credit for anything bordering on mischievous propensities—much less for viciousness: the men regarded him as a milksop—the ladies as a mere innocent lad with whom they might laugh and joke, roam and play, as if with a younger brother.

In respect to his personal appearance I ought to add that if he had chosen to dress himself up in female apparel, he might full easily have passed for one of the sex. His lips were of the richest red—somewhat pouting—and forming a

"In the first place, dearest—sweetest "Rosa," hastily responded the young gentleman, "tell me that I am not indifferent to you. Put my father out of the question: let us think only of ourselves—and if you will, let us act as if there were but you and I in the world. Tell me then—can you love me, if you do not love me yet? or at all events, will you accept this love of mine?"

My better feelings prompted me to demand delay ere I gave an answer—to commune with myself—to consult my own heart—to ascertain whether I could ever love him who proffered me his own love—and whether, all things considered, I ought eventually to return an affirmative or a negative. But on the other hand, selfish thoughts rose up in my mind: my father's difficulties—my brother's unemployed condition and idle mode of life—my own uncertain future,—a thousand considerations, in short, swept through my brain; and I felt that it would be worse than madness to kick away the golden ball which seemed to be rolling at my feet.

"You do not answer me, Rose," said Horace. "I beseech you to do so! Let me know the best or the worst at once: for I love you madly—my soul is bent upon you—answer, I entreat you! Will you accept my love?"

"Yes," I responded, again with blushing cheeks and in a murmuring tone.

He caught me in his arms: he strained me to his breast with a force—I might even say a fierce violence, of which I had not deemed his fragile arms to be capable. He pressed his lips to mine; he literally glued them there—so that through very shame and almost with a feeling of outraged modesty, I disengaged myself

from his embrace. Fortunately no observer was near; and this scene took place in a turning of the lane where the hedges were high on either side, and embowering trees mingled their overhanging branches. But as the sun, from his western throne of purple and orange, crimson and gold, flung his beams upon the countenance of Horace Rockingham, the eyes of this young man appeared to reflect the glowing flames: they literally devoured me with their regards—they expressed the sensuousness of the strongest passion—their glare enveloped me as it were with an unholy flood of living light. Again was my modesty shocked; I felt my cheeks blushing and burning; and I cast down my looks beneath the intense fireceness of those which were thus fixed upon me.

"Why do you draw yourself away? Why do you seem displeased?" he asked and his voice was now literally hoarse with the influence of concentrated passion; then, as—knowing not what to say, but feeling half offended, yet fearful and unwilling likewise to give offence—I remained silent, he once more caught me in his arms: once more he strained me with vehement earnestness to his breast and covered my cheeks and my lips with kisses.

"We shall be observed, Horace," I said, making this the excuse for forcibly extricating myself from his vicelike grasp.

"And who cares?" he exclaimed, with a sort of reckless wildness: "you have promised to be mine! O Rosa, how happy shall we be together! I will surround you with such luxuries as never hitherto you have known; I will bear you away from this secluded nook in Cheshire—I will take you to London—you shall ride in your

carriage: that beautiful person of yours shall be decked with gems—Oh, you shall be the admiration of all men and the envy of all women! Tell me, dearest one—when shall we depart?"

"Heavens, Horace! how excitedly and rapidly you are talking!" I said, gazing upon him with mingled alarm and suspicion in my looks. "Your father's consent must be obtained to our marriage; or he will disinherit you."

"Marriage?" echoed Horace, with so much wild sarcasm and sardonic mockery in his tone and looks, that all my dread suspicions and fears were confirmed in a moment. "Who dreams of such shackles? Who will voluntarily pass through the ordeal of that mummery which priestcraft has invented? No, dearest Rosa—that wretched fare is not necessary in order to bind my heart to you—"

"Enough, sir!" I exclaimed, my cheeks once more glowing with indignation; and I felt mad with myself to think that I had suffered his lips to pollute those cheeks with the sensuous kisses of unchaste and rabid passion. "You have dared to insult a defenceless girl; and you may thank me if I do not risk my brother's safety by informing him of the flagrant outrage which his sister has experienced at your hands. Leave me, sir! My road lies in this direction: yours in that!" and having rapidly pointed first towards the village, I then indicated the eminence in a contrary direction, on which Hawthorn Hall was situated, about a mile distant.

"Rose," he said, his looks betokening mingled astonishment and rage; this is truly insensate on your part! You must have understood me from the first—you must have known that my father would never consent to such a match!

You yourself declared he would disinherit me, and therefore were you aware that I cannot do what my heart would dictate."

"Mr. Rockingham," I replied, now more humiliated than indignant: for I could not help feeling that my selfishness is so readily accepted his supposed offer of marriage was righteously punished—"I will forgive you for what has just passed, on condition that you never again breathe so outrageous and insulting a proposal to my ear. Yes—I will forgive you on that condition; because," I added, the tears running down my cheeks, and my heart swelling as if about to burst, "I entertain the hope that you are sufficiently a man of honour not to boast to your acquaintances that you extracted an affirmative from my lips—or that for a single moment I was weak enough to abandon myself to your embrace. No: you will not plunge me—unhappy as I already am—more deeply down into the vortex of humiliation! you will not sully the fair fame of her whose virtue is her only dower! you will not lightly mention the name of the poor clergyman's daughter!"

"Rose, listen to me," said Horace, now speaking with the strong decision of one whose soul appeared to have suddenly concentrated all its power and who from the interior of a delicate, feminine, and fragile form, seemed to develop a mind capable of the strongest passions, and those passions endowing him with an iron power,—“listen to me! I have confessed that I love you madly; and I will admit more—I am resolved to possess you! Know me henceforth either as your most ardent and devoted admirer—or else as your most rancorous enemy. No: I shall boast

of nothing even if you persist in your refusal: "because," he added bitterly, I should not be believed in my boasting. There! I have frankly unbosomed my thoughts; because I wish you to comprehend precisely on what terms we stand. Therefore, consent to fly with me—What care you for such a home as you will leave, and for such a family as you will be forsaking?"

"Silence, sir!" I ejaculated, once more boiling with indignation: "it is of my parents and my brother that you are speaking thus insultingly!"—and having uttered those words, I moved rapidly onward.

"Only one word more!" he said clutching me violently by the arm; and his tones came hissing upon my ear as if borne on the breath of a snake. "You *shall* hear me! I am mad with passion, Rose! Those kisses which I have enjoyed—that contact with your form—has worked me up to frenzy! By heaven, you shall be mine; or else you shall know me as your bitterest, most implacable enemy! Ah, you begin to understand me now? you comprehend that he whom you have treated as a boy possesses the mind of a man—aye, and the energy of a giant! decide—decide quickly! Am I to be friend or foe?"

"Foe," I exclaimed wildly: "if your friendship can only be purchased by my dishonour."

I broke away from him and hurried onward to the village, not looking back until I reached its outskirts,—when feeling myself secure from farther insult, I slackened my pace and did for a moment revert my eyes. Horace Rockingham was no longer to be seen; and then I grew comparatively calm. But instead of proceeding homeward immediately, I took a somewhat circuitous

route: for I felt the necessity of collecting my thoughts and composing my features. Bitterly humiliated was I—the more so because I felt that if it were not for the sad predicament into which my family—was plunged, that young man would never have dared address me in such audacious and insulting terms. But it is the nature of the human mind—particularly in the season of youth—to make the best of adverse circumstances and disagreeable occurrences; and I consoled myself with the thought that he would not boast of having wrung from me an avowal (as he might flatter himself he had done)—or that I had for an instant abandoned myself to his caresses; because the fear of being laughed at as a boyish boaster would deter him. Thus cheering myself as well as I was able, I bent my steps homeward.

CHAPTER II.

A FAMILY GROUP.

Three months passed away: and October set in, cold windy: and inclement. During this interval I had not again seen Horace Rockingham—nor had I heard of him in any direct manner; though, from certain circumstances, I had but too much reason to fear that his terrible threats of enmity and vengeance, had not been mere idle words. The village of Hawthorn was at a distance of about two miles from a town in Cheshire, which I choose to denominate Riverdale,—again informing my readers that for motives which will transpire hereafter, I in some instances give fictitious names alike to persons and to places. In that

town dwelt the tradesmen with whom we principally dealt, and who were my father's chief creditors. The same tradesmen were for the most part those who likewise enjoyed the patronage of Mr. Rockingham of Hawthorn Hall; and therefore with them his son Horace had a considerable degree of influence. Immediately after the occurrence narrated in the previous chapter, those creditors became more clamorous than ever: law proceedings were rapidly initiated; and threats of measures to procure the sequestration of my father's living, were held out. I felt assured Horace Rockingham was the secret and wicked instigator of these more strenuous hostilities than any which had yet been adopted against my father. But what could I do? To endeavour to propitiate the vindictive Horace was impossible: there was but one means—and from this my mind shrank with utter loathing. I could not reveal to my parents and my brother my suspicions—or rather my convictions on the subject: because I knew full well that Cyril's spirit would immediately fire up against the youth who had so basely endeavoured to ruin his sister, and who was now so infamously seeking to involve the whole family in destruction. The wreaking of a vengeance by Cyril's hand upon Horace Rockingham would not stop, nor even mitigate the evil already done: whereas it would be certain to place my brother in the hands of powerful enemies, and leave him entirely at their mercy.

Let me now direct the reader's attention to one particular evening in the month of October, of that year—namely 1840—with which my narrative opens. In the modestly—I might even say hum-

bly furnished parlour at the parsonage-house, might our family be viewed. If that parlour contained a few pictures suspended to the walls, and a few ornaments upon the mantel, they were nevertheless of so comparatively valueless a description, that they could scarcely be turned into money at the broker's: or else assuredly thither would they have gone. Yet to a mere casual observer—if one had entered at the time of which I am speaking—the aspect of that parlour would have denoted a certain degree of modest comfort. A cheerful fire blazed in the grate: a huge cat was sleeping on a footstool; and behind where my father sat, a tumbler of hot spirits-and-water was steaming. But, alas! coals and alcoholic drink, as well as all the food we had that day tasted, had been obtained by the produce of my father's watch which my brother had been to Riverdale to pledge. We had no more credit with any of the tradesmen—no more income to receive till after Christmas; and there were three long months to be passed without the slightest knowledge of whence the necessities of life were to be obtained. Add to this predicament,—which would have been awkward enough of itself, without other troubles—the exceedingly pressing nature of my father's liabilities; and it may easily be supposed that our prospects were by no means cheering.

But let me say a few words in respect to my parents and my brother. On one side of the fire sat my father—the Rev. Mr. Lambert; and as I looked at him, I could not help sighing deeply as I observed his countenance bearing all the traces of an intemperance which was now becoming habitual and his apparel denoting

neglect and slovenliness. His countenance, when under the influence of liquor, had an expression partly of jovial warmth, partly of sottish dissipation; and to tell the truth—that truth which I could not conceal from myself—his aspect was mean and sordid, with but little of the sanctity of his profession left to redeem it. Care had driven him to the bottle; and when the influence of adversity is mingled with that of intemperance, the ravages worked upon the human appearance by those joint fiends are painfully striking indeed.

Near him sat my brother—at that time a young man of a little past two-and-twenty. His hair was much darker than mine: his eyes were also dark: his countenance was naturally handsome—but under the influences which weighed upon him it was visibly changing into an expression positively sinister and disagreeable. It indicated the temper of one who was chafed and irritated by disappointment,—the spirit naturally generous, marred and almost broken,—aspirations originally fervid and glowing, now well-nigh blighted and crushed. He hated the idleness of that life which he so unwillingly led. He had sought employment as a clerk in the town of Riverdale—but had found it not; and his father had not the means to enable him to visit the capital, or go elsewhere, in order to seek his fortune. Moreover Cyril had to contemplate the spectacle of that sire giving way to a degrading habit; he knew likewise that his father had done things which, if not actually criminal, were so mean, dirty, and dishonest, as to destroy all respect on the part of a son towards his parent:—and therefore the reader will comprehend

what I meant in the preceding chapter by describing my brother's position as being absolutely ruinous and demoralizing for a young man, no matter how good his principles might naturally be.

On the opposite side of the fire, sat my mother in a large easy-chair. She has already been alluded to as a confirmed invalid; and such, poor creature, she indeed was. Her lower limbs were paralyzed; for some years past she had entirely lost the use of them and had to be carried by myself and the servant-girl whom we kept, from the bed to the easy-chair, and from the easy-chair back to the bed. Originally she was of the mildest, the kindest, and the most benevolent of dispositions: but illness and adversity had gradually soured her temper, so that she had become petulant, impatient, and irritable. Of late, frequent quarrels had occurred between herself and my father,—chiefly because the latter invariably found the means to obtain intoxicating drink, even when there was scarcely a loaf for the daily meal. All these influences, these scenes, and these experiences, were sufficient to make a powerful impression upon the minds of my brother and myself; and when I beheld Cyril seated with folded arms in gloomy sullenness—or else heard him inveighing bitterly against that state of society which gave enormous wealth to a few and left the many in comparative poverty, or else in downright want—I could not wonder that this mood should be so sombre in the one instance or his invectives so bitter in the other.

I have already stated that my father's income averaged about one hundred and twenty pounds

a year. He had debts when first entering upon the living,—debts which had been contracted during the period that he was without ecclesiastical employment. These had to be settled; and the moment he obtained the incumbency of Hawthorn from Mr. Rockingham he was compelled to set apart twenty pounds a year for the liquidation of those liabilities. Then the parsonage-house had to be repaired and furnished, and for these purposes fresh debts were incurred—a further sum having to be set aside from his already reduced and limited income, nevertheless, by dint of the strictest frugality—by living more sparingly than even the smallest tradesman in the village—we had at first managed to rub on without exceeding our resources, until my mother's unfortunate illness entailed fresh expenses upon us. Then came the raising of money by bills—the continuous anticipation of the undue income—the losses through usurious interest, and fees for renewal of the bills—law-expenses—and the whole host of evils which flow and accumulate rapidly around a man who becomes involved in pecuniary difficulties. By degrees my father grew reckless—getting in debt where he could—never caring for the morrow so that the day's wants were provided for—often living luxuriously as long as the supplies lasted—and remaining deaf to the entreaties of those who urged him to a recurrence to frugal habits. It was in this way that he plunged deeper and deeper down into the vortex of perplexities—until the crisis was now reached when all credit was stopped, embarrassments of the most serious and fatal aspects were closing in around, and ruin was staring us in the face. For if

the living were sequestered for the debts which were due—if the sources of income were thus altogether snatched away—what on earth was to become of us? This was the question which we were deliberating in a sort of family council, on that October evening when I have thus introduced to the little parlour at the parsonage-house. But the tumbler of hot spirits-and-water which stood upon a table behind my father's chair was a sad illustration of that sort of desperate recklessness and even devil-me-care state of mind to which the unhappy man had become reduced.

"Well, something must be done," he said, thus breaking a pause which had occurred in the melancholy conversation: "and the old proverb assures us that when things are at the worst they often take a turn and mend for the best."

"Father," responded Cyril, in a tone of stern remonstrance, "it is painful to hear you speak with what I cannot help styling a flippant levity most unworthy of you in every sense. You cannot think that it is by sitting down idly here and talking in such a strain that your affairs will amend themselves of their own accord."

"To be sure not!" cried my mother, in the sharp querulous voice of a sour-tempered invalid. "Something must be done—and that promptly—or we shall be turned out of our home; and I see no resource but to go to the work-house."

Here my brother gave so sudden a start, and dashed the open palm of his hand with such excited violence upon his thigh, as he resumed his seat again, that I almost shrieked out with wild terror.

"Don't do that, Cyril!" exclaimed my mother! "it is cruel of you! You know how nervous I am:"—Then as my brother made no answer, but looked more deeply sombre and more gloomily sullen than before, she went on to observe, "I tell you what must be done; and I have told you so, Peter,"—thus addressing my father—"Over and over again for some months past: you must have recourse to Mr. Rockingham."

It was now my turn to start—but not as violently as my brother had done; so that the movement on my side passed unperceived. I had been suddenly smitten with the thought how vain it was to seek for succour in that quarter; for even if Mr. Rockingham had been a man at all likely to grant it, there was an individual in the person of his son who would be sure to frustrate the design.

"It is of no use, my dear," said my father, addressing himself to my mother, in answer to her suggestion, "to think of applying again to Mr. Rockingham. Did I not beg and implore six or seven months ago that he would advance me only ten pounds——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Cyril with another start: for every fact or allusion which exposed the nakedness of our poverty sent the pang of shame's caustic agony vibrating through his heart. "There is nothing to expect from Mr. Rockingham: he is a thoroughly selfish worldly minded man. Ah, I understand him full well! Such dispositions as *his* are unfortunately not rare on the earth. He gave you this living because he was compelled to give it to somebody, and it costs him nothing to bestow it upon you. Therefore he made a merit of the action, and set it down to a generous sentiment of friend-

ship. But he let you enter upon the incumbency without a shilling to help you: you found a half-dilapidated house, which he offered not to put into repair: he knew your circumstances—and yet no really kind succour did he volunteer towards the purchase of a little furniture. And he has seen you struggling on against difficulties—he has beheld you sinking deeper and deeper into the mire—he has looked coldly on—and never has he relaxed from his stern impassable egotism to proffer the assistance of a single guinea! You have applied to him more than once—and he has refused. By heaven!" ejaculated Cyril, with impetuous vehemence, "I do even believe that he only invites us to his mansion to dazzle us with the splendour, the sumptuousness, and the luxury by which he is surrounded; and perhaps in the very knowledge of our distresses, is there a source of secret gloating pleasure for himself. I hate him—Yes, I hate him!—and sooner than that we should again humble ourselves by asking at his hands a boon which is certain to be refused, we will starve!"

My brother had gone on speaking with increasing vehemence, and with a deepening flush upon his countenance. He rose too from his seat, and walked about in the little parlour with violent gesticulations.

"Cyril," I said, approaching him—taking him by the arm—and looking up with affectionate earnestness into his countenance, "do not give way to this useless intemperance of passion. Just now," I added, in a low whisper, "you reproached our father for dealing in mere words. Do not you fall into the same fault. Let

your tongue convey counsel of a practical character, instead of giving vent to import denunciations.

"You are right, 'Rose,'" he said, resuming his seat: and then he immediately fell into one of his darkly sombre moods.

"Well, my boy," said our father, with a kind of reckless half-scottish laugh—for he had just finished his spirits-and-water; "what are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking, father," responded Cyril, abruptly raising his eyes and bending them almost fiercely on his sire, "that unless you can raise thirty pounds by to-morrow at twelve o'clock, we shall have an execution in the house for that debt of Ridgway's; and all the furniture will be swept off—or what is worse, you yourself will be taken to gaol. Now, there is a fact for you to look in the face! Don't attempt to shrink away from the contemplation: it stands palpable—tangible—like a gaunt spectre before you!"

At this moment there was a knock at the front door; and the servant-girl presently announced Mr. Watson. This person was a farmer living close by; and the land which he rented of Mr. Rockingham, paid in the form of tithe-commutation a very considerable part of the little income which my father derived from the vicarage of Hawthorn. He was a middle-aged man—blunt, without being rude in his manner—straight forward in his dealings—and therefore enjoying an excellent repute in the neighbourhood. I must add, too, that while so many of our former friends and acquaintances had of late been deserting and looking coldly upon us, Mr. Watson and his family

had appeared to regard us with a commiserating sympathy; and the little presents of butter, eggs, poultry, and so forth, which they occasionally sent in, had been found very acceptable indeed.

"Good evening, Mr. Lambert," said the farmer, as he entered the room. "Good evening, ma'am." I hope I find you better:—"and then he had a kind word for Cyril and myself.

"Take a glass of something hot, Mr. Watson," said my father. "Rose, dear, fetch a clean tumbler——"

"Pray do not trouble yourself, Miss Lambert," interrupted the farmer, gravely, as his eyes lingered in a sort of depreciating manner upon the flushed and half-tipsy countenance of my father. "I am not going to stay a minute. I only looked in to tell you, sir," he continued, addressing himself to my sire, "that I am going to give up the farm to my son-in-law, as I have arranged with Mr. Rockingham to take a larger one. You know Edgefield, the other side of Riverdale? Well, I have taken that."

"And a beautiful property it is," observed my father.

"Yes—I think I shall do well upon it," observed Mr. Watson.

"You will do well anywhere," said my mother, heaving a profound sigh, as she quickly turned her eyes from Mr. Watson to her husband,—as if mentally contrasting the difference between the two positions.

"Well, I work hard, ma'am," rejoined the farmer; "and therefore manage to get an honest crust. But I must be off," he added, looking at his watch. "I only just dropped in to remind you, Mr. Lambert, that when I paid those five-and-thirty pounds last Christmas, you did not give me a

receipt, you know; and as I and my son-in-law are going over the accounts together, I wish to leave all square and straight. So if you will have the kindness to send me along the receipt the first thing in the morning, I shall be obliged."

"The receipt?" said my father, looking as if he were very much astonished.

"To be sure!" exclaimed the farmer. "Don't you recollect you came to me in a very great hurry one morning, to ask for the money? I gave you the bank notes; and you promised to send the receipt round—but you did not. I suppose it slipped your memory as indeed it did mine till I came to look into the farm accounts."

"Well, I will see about it in the morning," said my father: "for, of course, if I had the money, I shall find a memorandum down in the tithe-book."

"If you had it, Mr. Lambert!" exclaimed the farmer, with some degree of astonishment and annoyance. "There can be no doubt of it. You must recollect it."

"But I don't thought, at this minute," was my father's response: and it was given with such an air of confidence that I really thought at the time he must be right and the farmer must be wrong: so that if this money were really due to us, it would be a perfect godsend. I perceived also that Cyril thought just as I did, by the manner in which he was gazing on our father.

"Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Lambert," said Watson, "that you do not perfectly well recollect receiving that money?"

"I have no recollection of it at all," was the response boldly and firmly given; "and I was just thinking, at the time you came

in, that I should call upon you to-morrow for those arrears."

"Indeed!"—and Mr. Watson rose from his seat with an abruptness which showed how much he was annoyed. "Now, look you, Mr. Lambert: we will have but a very few words over this matter. I am a blunt straightforward man; and I will have the thing settled in one way or another. Do you mean to give me that receipt or not?"

"Get the tithe-book, Cyril," said our father; "and we will soon see whether the payment is entered or not."

My brother issued from the room: and during the few minutes he was absent, not a word was spoken: but Mr. Watson had an air of stern indignation upon his usually frank and honest-looking countenance. Cyril returned and gave my father the book,—which, upon being referred to, exhibited no entry of the particular payment under discussion. That so important a sum as thirty-five pounds should have been lost sight of for so many months, by a family possessed of so limited an income and continuously reduced to such straits and shifts, may seem strange: but when I observe that my father kept the accounts—that he had grown slovenly and neglectful—and that, by a frequent anticipation of all sources of income, everything like regularity in the financial arrangements had been lost sight of,—it did seem quite possible, and even probable, to myself and Cyril, as well as to our mother; that this particular amount had really not been paid and had hitherto been forgotten.

"You see," said my father, "there is no memorandum of the payment here."

"Perhaps not," observed Mr. Watson, bluntly. "But do you

mean to deny that you received the money?"

"Most certainly I do," was the answer given with all the bold countenance of truth: and as he thus spoke, my father lost his half-inebriated look.

"Then you refuse to give me the receipt?" said Mr. Watson.

"Certainly—as there has been no payment."

"Very well, Lambert," continued the farmer. "I know that, as far as law goes, I am in the wrong—and shall therefore put myself right. Here, sir, is the money and now give me a receipt."

"Father," said Cyril, with deep earnestness of look and voice, "if there is any possibility of mistake in the matter, I beg you —

"Nonsense! there is no mistake interrupted my father, still with an air of the most truthful confidence. "Draw up a receipt, Cyril, and I will sign it."

This was done; and Mr. Watson counted down the amount in gold and bank-notes, which my father clutched with an avidity and with a joyous twinkling of the eyes that conjured up strange feelings of apprehension and suspicion in my heart: while Cyril himself stood gazing in a sort of sombre uncertainty upon his sire's countenance. As for our mother, she had remained silent throughout the scene, and was evidently as much bewildered by it as were Cyril and myself.

"Now, Mr. Lambert," said the farmer. "I have put myself right with regards to law: but can *you* do so in the morality of the business? I take God to witness that I have now paid you the money twice over! I hope for your own sake—for the sake of your wife—and for the example your children, that you really have forgotten the first payment. But I

fear, sir, yes, I fear that it is otherwise, and, if so, I do not envy you your feelings now."

"We don't want a lecture from you, Mr. Watson," exclaimed my father, assuming a threatening aspect.

"I have no more to say," rejoined the farmer; and without another word—without even a parting salutation to any of us—he abruptly quitted the house.

"Well, this is a lucky thing!" said my father, with a sort of subdued chuckle which did me harm to hear. "Make me another glass, Rose—Why, what are you standing there for, looking at me in this way? Do you think I robbed the man?"

"Heaven forbid!" I almost shrieked forth; and anxious to escape as it were from my own poignantly harrowing thoughts, I snatched up the empty tumbler and hurried from the room. But as I thus passed forth, I could not help noticing that my brother Cyril was standing with arms folded, and with his eyes fixed in so peculiar a manner upon his father's countenance, that I had no difficulty in comprehending what was uppermost in his mind; and as I sped to the kitchen to procure some hot water, I murmured to myself, "My God! my God! is it possible that my own father has really done a dishonest deed?"

When I returned to the parlour, I found that Cyril had gone up to his chamber; and as it was now time for myself and the servant-girl to assist my mother to the room where she slept, the poignancy of my reflections was, for the moment, absorbed in the bustle of these preparations for retiring to rest.

CHAPTER III.

FRESH STRUGGLES AND FRESH
RESOURCES.

I HAD not been many moments in my own chamber, when the door gently opened; and Cyril made his appearance. He was pale as death; and a strange—almost a fearful light—was burning in his eyes. He put his finger to his lip to enjoin silence: for he doubtless perceived that I was so struck by his aspect as to be on the point of sending forth an ejaculation of terror.

"Hush, Rose!" he said, closing the door as noiselessly as he had opened it: "we must not be overheard."

"But what is the matter, my dearest brother?" I inquired. yet full well could I comprehend the hideous thoughts which were agitating in his mind; for the same had fastened their vulture-talons upon the most sensitive chords of my own heart.

"Rose," he said, in a low hoarse voice,—and as he drew close towards me his hot breath literally burnt my cheek,—“a horrible suspicion is torturing me. It racks me like a fiend—it excruciates me like a remorse. I could not retire to bed before I had spoken to you. Indeed, I am determined to fathom this fearful mystery. For if our father's difficulties are to be bolstered up by crime—”

"My God, Cyril!" I murmured: and I felt that I also had become pale as death; "we must not entertain that thought. I shudder at the bare idea—”

"Yes, Rose," he interrupted me, with a vehemence that was almost fierce; "but you cannot prevent yourself from entertaining the suspicion. I know you do! I saw

by your countenance down-stairs just now that you were smitten with the same horrible misgiving which siezed upon me."

"O Cyril! are we indeed to think so ill of our own father?"—and I burst into tears.

"Yes—weep, Rose!" responded my brother, in a low voice, but with a terrible bitterness of accent "weep—for you have indeed but too much cause! Our sire—the author of our being—is dishonoured in the eyes of his own children. It is horrible—horrible!"

"And yet if he be innocent?" I exclaimed passionately. "Oh, let us think so! We must, we must!"

"Would to heaven that we could!" cried my brother: and the awfully sombre expression of his countenance showed how impossible it was for him to adopt that favourable belief. "But, as I just now said, I am resolved to fathom this mystery. So long as it is involved in the slightest uncertainty, I shall be the most wretchedly restless of human creatures. I am determined to know the best or the worst at once:"—and as he thus spoke he hastily took off his boots.

"What do you mean to do?" I inquired, astonished at this proceeding.

"What will I do?" he echoed. "I will go and listen at the door of our parent's room. They are certain to be speaking of the matter; and as they have no secrets from each other—”

"But, Cyril, do you not reflect that it is wrong to play the eaves-dropper with regard to our father and our mother?"—and as I thus spoke, I fixed upon my brother a look of earnest depreciating entreaty.

"I reflect upon nothing but the one hideous mystery which I am

resolved to clear up:"—and his words were uttered with a passionate vehemence which I saw was beyond control. "Come with me, if you will; but not another syllable of remonstrance! Yes—come with me. Rose;"—and he looked half wild, half mad, as he spoke. "It is better that *you* also should have every doubt cleared up.

There was such hurry and confusion in my brain—such a fearful bewilderment in my thoughts—that I knew not what I was doing; and mechanically did I follow my brother from the room. We descended the stairs softly: for I should observe that ever since paralysis had seized upon our mother, she and my father slept upon the ground floor.

Cyril led the way, holding me by the hand with a grasp of spasmodic violence; so that it was in a sort of dismayed terror and automaton-like obedience I accompanied him. We reached the door of our parent's chamber; they were talking within; and the very first words which smote our ears were but too well calculated to rivet us to the spot.

"Well, then," my father was saying, in a tone of reckless bravado. "I don't care a fig what the children may think. Let them think what they like! The world is warning against us; and we will war against the world. It is useless to stand on punctilios. We can't afford to be honest any longer—and that's all about it."

"Ah, Peter," said my mother, "this is dreadful language—dreadful, dreadful!"

"But it would be much more dreadful for us to have all the furniture swept away. Now don't you see?—this money will settle Ridgway's claim to-morrow; and we shall have five pounds over

and above to go on with. Then if next Monday we could only manage to pay that hundred pounds to Smithson, who threatens the sequestration proceedings—"

"But I can never bring myself to write such a letter as you have suggested," interrupted my mother in her shrill querulous voice. "I won't do it, Peter—I won't indeed! It is shocking of you to devise such a fraud, and endeavour to lead me into it."

"Fraud? What nonsense!" ejaculated my father, in a tone of brutal scorn, mingled with anger. "I tell you that you *must* write the letter. Fraud? it's all nonsense! There's no fraud in getting money from one's own relations."

"But you know, Peter, that ever since our marriage, all correspondence has ceased between me and the Haverstocks—except the useless appeals I have at times made—"

"All through the cursed pride of your sister!" exclaimed my father. "Just because you married a poor clergyman!" he added, with a scornful chuckle, "And by heaven, it is a poor clergyman, too, that you thréw yourself away upon! But if you don't wish to see us reduced to beggary, and all go to the workhouse——"

"Well, well," interrupted my mother, "don't talk any more of it to-night: do hold your tongue—and I will see what is to be done to-morrow."

The voices ceased; and when at the expiration of a minute they began conversing again, it was on another topic. Cyril—who had never once let me go my hand, but had almost at every instant tightened his grasp upon it, as if his whole frame were writhing with a spasmodic agony as the words of our parent's discourse

smote him blow upon blow,—now led me away from the door where our ears had received such terrible revelations, not merely confirming our worst suspicions, but even proving that the first step in the downward path of crime was to be quickly followed by another. We reached my chamber again: and there Cyril, suddenly drooping my hand, said in a voice so fearfully altered from its natural tones that it sent the blood with an ice-chill to my heart's core. "Now, Rose, there is no longer any uncertainty! Our own father is a villain—our mother will lend herself to his infamous devices—"

"No, no!" I murmured, with excruciation of feeling, "we will interfere, Cyril—"

"Ridiculous!" he ejaculated, scornfully. "Would you confess that we had played the part of eavesdroppers? No, no. I charge you not to breathe a syllable which shall betray our proceeding. Do you hear me, Rose? And do you promise?"

"Yes, yes. Cyril: I promise anything—everything! But for heaven's sake speak not with this desperate recklessness of tone—it fills me with the most terrible alarms!"

"What! that I myself shall turn criminal next?" He said, in a low hoarse whisper, but with accents of the bitterest, fiercest irony. "Well, it is possible: for I see that we are a doomed family—and it is useless to struggle against destiny. Good night, Rose—and pray if you can."

With these words he left me abruptly. But what did he mean by telling me to pray if I could? There was something of horrible mockery in the tone with which the syllables were uttered; and as the light of the candle threw its beams upon his features, the ex-

pression of that pale countenance was even fiendishly sardonic. I retired to rest with tears in my eyes, with anguish in my heart, and with the most horrible forebodings in respect to the future. I endeavoured to pray: but the syllables died upon my lips—for I felt as if God himself was deserting us.

I should here explain that my mother had married entirely in opposition to the wishes of her family; and that her father (her maternal parent having been long previously dead) disowned and discarded her. He was a tolerably wealthy man; and when he died, which was shortly after her disobedient marriage—her name was not even mentioned in his will. All his property was left to her sister, who was married to Sir John Haverstock—a rich baronet. The Haverstocks had likewise broken off all communication and correspondence with my mother; and though, under the pressure of difficulties, she had occasionally written the most appealing letters for pecuniary succour, they had never elicited more than one reply from her sister, Lady Haverstock. This reply, couched in the most laconic terms, was to the effect that my mother need hope for no succour at the hands of her offended relatives, so long as the husband on whom she had chosen to throw herself away was alive. Indeed, the unfeeling epistle seemed to intimate that the Haverstocks would be glad to hear of Mr. Lambert's death—in the event of which casualty they could alone be induced to render the slightest assistance to my mother.

But to resume the thread of my narrative, after having passed a wretched and almost sleepless night, I descended in the morning

with a racking headache, and the first person whom I met down stairs was my brother Cyril. His countenance was very pale, and seemed to wear an expression of of dogged, sullen resolution. He caught me by the arm; and hastily as well as hoarsely whispered in my ear, "Remember your solemn promise, Rose!—not a syllable of what took place last night!"

I gave him to understand that my pledge should be inviolably kept: but when I looked my father and mother in the face, I could scarcely prevent myself from bursting into tears—throwing myself at their feet—avowing what I had overheard...and imploring not to take another step forward in the descent of 'wrong-doing. Cyril, doubtless, understood what was passing in my mind: for as I glanced towards him across the breakfast-table, I perceived his dark eyes fixed significantly upon me, and with even a look of fierce menace,—as if to warn me not to break the promise he had extorted from me. I was glad when the meal was over; and I sought in the bustle and occupation of household affairs, to escape from the bitter anguish of my thoughts. Cyril went out for a walk in one direction; and my father proceeded to Riverdale to settle Ridgway's claim. He was absent until about three in the afternoon; and when he came back, it was with the flushed countenance and watery eyes of one who had been drinking. He drew forth a packet of letterpaper, which he proceeded at once to lock up in his desk: but as the envelope happened to come off, I was struck by observing that there was a sheet of black-edged paper amongst the rest. It however instantaneously occurred to me that it must have been put in the parcel by an oversight of the

stationer where the purchase was made. Nevertheless, I did not like the scrutinizing look which both my father and mother bent upon me when they saw that I had caught a glimpse of that black-edged sheet. I issued quickly from the room—put on my bonnet and shawl—and went out for a walk.

While proceeding through the village, I encountered Mr. Watson's daughters; and the colour mantled on my cheeks as they crossed pointedly over to the opposite side, thus giving me the complete cut. Oh, what an agony of shame did I then experience!—for but too well did I comprehend in the cause of this behaviour on their part; and I felt that the sins of the father were indeed being visited upon the children. I turned into the fields: I wept floods of tears—I sat down upon a bank, convulsed with anguish: it is impossible for language to describe the poignancy of the affliction which I then endured. All of a sudden the sounds of a horse's hoofs upon the hard bridle-path through the field, smote upon my ears: I looked up, and beheld Horace Rockingham. He cantered gracefully—for he was a beautiful rider—up to the spot where I hastened to rise from the bank, at the same time wiping the tears from my eyes.

"So we meet again, Miss Lambert," he said, modulating his musical voice to a cold firmness: then, as I was rapidly moving away from the spot, he sprang from his horse, holding the bridle by one hand, and grasping my arm by the other.

"Release me sir!" I exclaimed with burning indignation, as I tore my arm from his clutch.

"One word, Miss Lambert—and only one word!" he cried,

with an emphasis which had a mingled significancy and authority that forced me to stop despite of myself.

"You have doubtless begun to find out," he went on to say, "that the menaces I uttered upwards of three months back, were not mere idle words. Stay! I have put a few syllables to speak on the present occasion. Ruin hovers over your family: the web is closing in around you all—and your father by his own conduct is helping to precipitate the catastrophe."

"Wretched boy!" I exclaimed—and I felt that my eyes flashed fire: "you are the fiend who has been hastening that ruin of which you now speak so gloatingly!"

"Yes—I deny it not—I glory in it," he cried: and there was a devil's mockery in the laugh which his lips sent forth. "One word, Rose, ere we separate! You shall be mine I have sworn that I will possess you—"

"Never!" I ejaculated, vehemently: and again I was hastening away, when once more he caught me by the arm.

"But you *shall* hear me!" he cried, with all the haughty insolence of a man, and which, really for the moment blinded my eyes to the fact that it was the delicate frail-looking stripling who thus spoke. "You have again called me a boy! In your anger have you done that which in your familiarity you were wont to do. Well, but the boy—as you term him—will coerce you with a giant's power. Rest assured that the time will come when houseless, foodless—or else to save yourself from that two-fold condition of utter misery—you will accept my proffer."

"Never, you vile boy!" I ejaculated, passionately: and then I hurried away—but not before I caught the fierce glare of his eyes

as their light seemed to blaze upon me with a devouring and overwhelming power.

He sprang upon his horse, and galloped away. I roamed awhile through the fields; and when I had somewhat tranquillized the strong emotions which had been excited, I bent my steps homeward. My brother overtook me; and I now made a superhuman effort to subdue whatsoever traces of agitation might have remained on my features: because not for worlds would I have had him penetrate the source of my recent trouble. I asked him where he had been, and why of late he had never offered to take me out for a walk, as he was at one time wont to do?

"Because, Rose," he answered, bitterly "I can brook no other companionship than my own thoughts; and even from those would I at times fain flee away, if such flight were possible. Think you not that after the scenes of last night I have had enough to think of? I have wandered far—I have hurried on through the distant fields—I have called aloud to my God to help me, and snatch me from the brink of that precipice on which I feel myself to be standing!"

"You, Cyril!" I exclaimed, turning upon my brother my affrighted glances. "To what do you allude?"

"Are we not all hovering on the very verge of ruin?" he demanded. "Think you that if by any fresh iniquity, such as that which we heard vaguely and distantly alluded to last night, our father should succeed in staying off the next difficulty which he will have to confront,—there will not be a dozen others coming up in rapid succession to ravage our house like the batta-

lions of an invading army? Ah, Rose! do not blind yourself to the fact that our position is frightful, horrible to contemplate!"

I remained silent: I feared by any fresh comment or question to work up my brother's feeling to a still greater degree of excitement;—and he continued walking by my side in a mood of sombre reserve. In this way we reached the parsonage and found our father seated over his spirits-and-water.

Several days passed—the end of the week came and the Saturday morning's post brought a letter, for which my father was evidently on the watch, inasmuch as he ran forth to receive it from the postman's hand the instant this individual was seen approaching the door. Hastily tearing it open, my father with exulting look produced a bank-note, exclaiming "A hundred pounds! Smithson will be paid!"

It was evident that he did not choose to trouble himself with what might be written in the letter which he handed to my mother, who was in a sort of feverish haste to read it while I glanced towards Cyril, who threw upon me a look of mingled significance and depreciation, as much as to say that the fraud had been perpetrated—that it had proved successful—but that I was still to adhere to my promise of not mentioning how we had overheard our parents discussing the nefarious stratagem, whatsoever it were, which had brought this pecuniary succour.

Again was my father speedily off to Riverdale; and while I was occupied in domestic duties, assisting the servant-girl in her work,—Cyril, instead of roaming abroad as of late had been his wont, remained in the parlour with his

mother. Some hours thus passed; and in the middle of the day Cyril came to where I was occupied, and beckoned me apart. I saw that he had something of importance to communicate: for his looks were strange with mingled wildness and gloomy resolve—as if apart from the intelligence he had to give. There was in his mind a fixed determination of some desperate nature.

"For heaven's sake keep me not in suspense, Cyril!" I said, tortured with anxiety. "Some new calamity has happened?"

"No, nothing new—only the unravelment of that mysterious fraud which we heard the other night dimly and vaguely hinted at. You have already learnt Rose, that your father is a villain: you are now to be informed that your mother has stained herself with dark dishonesty—"

"Cyril! Cyril!" I murmured in agony: "beware of what you say!"

"Nay—but hear me," he ejaculated, while a horribly sardonic expression swept over his countenance. "Do you know wherefore I have stayed at home all the forenoon? I will tell you. It was to obtain an insight into that letter which came this morning. Our mother placed it behind her in the easy-chair: I waited patiently till she dozed off: then I took the letter—"

"Cyril!" and I was shocked at his proceeding."

"Nonsense, Rose! do not upbraid me! I am determined to know everything. No step shall our parents take in whatsoever direction—either a right or a wrong one without its being scrutinized and discovered by me. There was no more harm in reading that letter than in listening the other night at the door."

"But both were wrong, Cyril; and deeply have I since regretted."

"This is ridiculous Rose!" interrupted my brother, impatiently. "Are we to walk blindly on to our ruin? is there not at least some little satisfaction in watching the influences which are precipitating us thither! Well, but about this letter! I read it. It is from Lady Haverstock—and in answer to one which, it appears, our mother wrote last Tuesday. And what think you is the pretty little fraud," he demanded with a laugh that seemed to ring with the mockery of a fiend, "which elicited that supply of money?"

"I cannot conjecture," I murmured, in an almost dying tone,

"Our mother wrote to her sister, Lady Haverstock, to say that her husband was no more—"

"Cyril!" I ejaculated; and I felt dismayed and astounded.

"Yes—it is so, Rose. Only fancy a wife bringing her mind to such a degree of cold-blooded callousness that she could sit down and write a detailed narrative of the fictitious death of her own husband;—only conceive a woman capable of such a horror! Picture to yourself that woman minutely setting forth the distresses into which the sudden bereavement had plunged her—her inability to buy mourning—the total want of means to inter the deceased decently—an execution in the house—the very corpse itself under the embargo of the law! Well, Rose—all this has our mother done!"

"Cyril say no more—You have already said too much!"—and I felt as if I were about to faint.

"Do not yield to childish feelings," he said, hoarsely and fiercely, as he grasped me by the arm, and even shook me violently. "We are not in a position that

we can afford to give way to lackadaisical emotions. And remember, Rose—not a word of all I have told you! nota syllable to betray our parents that we are tracing their misdeeds step by step!"

Having thus spoken, Cyril hurried abruptly away; and from the little back garden where our colloquy had taken place, I presently beheld him passing slowly through the fields, with his arms folded across his breast—his looks bent down—his footsteps slow—and his whole appearance indicating that the sombre mood was upon him. I remained in that garden for some minutes ere I could venture to return into the house: for I felt that I should not dare face even the servant-girl, because my features would betray the terrible trouble which was agitating in my mind. Oh! to think that my mother could have done so bad a deed—could have committed such a flagrant fraud! Now was I no longer at a loss to conjecture for what purpose that black-edged sheet of paper had been wanted: it was the one on which the false tale of death was borne to her sister in London! As I reflected up on the whole proceeding, I felt so wretched that I could cheerfully have welcomed death. At length I succeeded in assuming a certain air of composure: but when I next entered the parlour and met my mother's gaze, I quickly averted my eyes, and affected to be busy in arranging the books upon the shelf; for I felt as abashed and as confused as if I myself had been doing something wrong, and was afraid of having the secret penetrated. For, oh! innocence itself will blush, when, on the part of a child, it has to look guilt in the face, and that guilt personified in a parent!

At a late hour my father returned from Riverdale: he was in a condition of half-tipsy exultation for Smithson's liability was settled, and he doubtless felt that he had now breathing-time, at least a fortnight must elapse ere the next claim would become very urgent. I will not dwell upon the thoughts and feelings which distracted me during that fortnight: suffice it to say that the interval passed:—and now, on the eve of another serious difficulty, we were all once more assembled in what may be termed a family council. The scene was pretty well the same as that which I described on the first evening when introducing the reader to the interior of our little parlour,—with this difference, however, that my father, having grown bolder—or I perhaps ought to say more callous and indifferent in respect to his drinking habits—did not now put his glass on the table behind him, but had the tray, the bottle, and the accessories, placed upon a table in front of him.

"Well, here we are, quite like a parliament," he said with a sort of chuckle, as if his speech were a very witty one and his misfortunes were a subject for jest; "because we are sitting in committee of ways and means. There's Jone's threatened execution will be in to-morrow for seventy-eight pounds; and not seventy-eight pence to meet it with."

"I suppose," said my brother, in a coldly quiet manner, "your own resources are exhausted, and you have no more unpaid tithes of which you can demand a settlement?"

"What do you mean by that remark?" exclaimed our sire, becoming purple in the face. "You don't suppose—do you—that I cheated Watson?"

"I do not say so," answered Cyril, still with glacial tranquillity—a tranquillity more horrible to contemplate than even a storm of passion would have been: "but every one in the neighbourhood says that you did—"

"I know what the lying scoundrels do say," interrupted my father. "But never mind!"—and he tossed off the remaining contents of his glass, as if in the alcoholic fluid all care could be drowned.

"And you, mother," continued Cyril, "have no fresh resource?"

"What does the boy mean?" she cried, in the sharp voice of querulous irritability.

"Only," responded Cyril, "that as you yourself observed the other day, your sister Lady Haverstock had at length relented somewhat and had sent that hundred pound note,—I thought perhaps you might manage to get another supply from the same quarter?"

This was a scene most shockingly painful to me: and I saw that both my father and mother were eyeing Cyril—the former with a half tipsy look, the latter with all the keenness of her most piercing gaze,—while he affected (for I saw that it *was* affectation) to be totally unconscious that he was thus the object of their close scrutiny. Then they exchanged glances, as much as to inquire of each other whether it were possible that Cyril could have penetrated the fraud which had been committed in respect to Lady Haverstock.

"Well," continued my brother, "I am to suppose therefore that *you*, father, have no resource left—and that *you* mother, are equally without one. Yet, seventy-eight pounds must be paid to-morrow, or else the furniture will

be swept away; and if once that crowning disgrace should occur, we may all as well go and hang ourselves. So I suppose that it is *my* turn to try a resource—which very fortunately I have at this moment.”

“You, Cyril?” I ejaculated, while my father and mother gazed upon him in speechless amazement; and all the time he preserved that cold tranquillity—glacial self-possession—which appeared to me so fearfully unnatural and therefore so terribly ominous.

“Yes,” he said, rising from his seat with a sudden assumption of a careless demeanour, as if it were after all a very simple matter which he had in view: “fortunately I have a resource. I have formed an acquaintance with a gentleman at Riverdale—a new inhabitant there who has taken a liking for me. On the last occasion that I saw him, he gave me to understand he was not altogether unacquainted with our pecuniary difficulties; and that in time of need he would not mind relieving them to a reasonable extent. So I will set off and see him at once.”

“This evening, Cyril? I exclaimed. It is nine o’clock.”

“No matter, Rose,” he answered “It is a starlit night—clear and frosty; and I shall enjoy the walk. I can have a bed at my friend’s house?”

“But who is this friend?” inquired my father.

“Never mind who he is,” responded Cyril: then with a laugh, he added, “I am not going to give you the information, and thus enable you to call upon my friend and pester him for fresh loans. What I shall get from him this evening, will be a sum once for all lent—or rather given. So you

may expect me at breakfast-time; and if he is the man I take him to be. I shall not come back empty-handed.”

With these words Cyril issued from the parlour: but I followed him into the passage as he was putting on his hat and great coat; and in a low whispering voice, I said, “Dearest brother, you know not what dread misgivings and alarms your words and looks have excited within me! I am afraid—forgive me if I wrong you—but I am afraid that you have not been speaking the truth about this friend of yours—

“Indeed I have Rose,” answered Cyril, also in whispering accents; “and you must agree with me that I only performed a wise part in concealing his name from my father. Do not detain me, dear Rose—or I shall not reach the house before he is in bed. Good night.”

He then issued from the dwelling; and I re-entered the parlour, where I found my father and mother bewildering themselves in conjectures who Cyril’s friend could be; for they evidently believed implicitly the tale which he had told—as indeed I did now. After the assurances which he had given me, how could I any longer doubt it? Yet when I retired to rest that night, my mind was agitated with certain vague fears which haunted me like indefinite shapes dimly seen through a deep mist. I lay awake for a long time; and when sleep gradually came over me, it brought troubles and anxious dreams, which lasted till the morning. It was still dusk— it being the beginning of November—when I rose from my feverish couch; and scarcely had I descended to the parlour, when Cyril entered the house. He looked exceedingly pale and also hag-

gard, as if he had sat up the greater portion, or even the whole of the night. But he smiled when he saw me; and yet methought it was a forced and sickly smile—and I anxiously inquired if he were ill?

"To tell the truth, I am not very well, Rose," he responded with the assumption of a careless air: "for the fact is, my friend would make me sit down and share a bottle of wine with him. I could not refuse—particularly as I had a boon to request; and as you know I am naturally temperate, it was quite a debauch for me."

"Ah! no wonder you feel and look ill," I said. "I will make haste and get you a cup of tea."

"Do, Rose—and I will just go up and put off these muddy boots. The weather has completely changed, you see; and a nasty drizzling rain is falling. But by the bye, you must be anxious to know the success of my visit. I have got eighty pounds—and so to-day's liability is cared for. I wonder which will be the next—and still more how it is to be met."

He ascended to his chamber; and while I was preparing the breakfast, my father entered the sitting-room. He had heard Cyril come in; and eagerly asked me what intelligence he had brought. When I informed him, he rubbed his hands gleefully—observing, "But I wish Cyril would tell us who this kind friend is that I might go and thank him personally."

I made no answer: for indeed I myself was unable to give one—and I went to assist the servant-girl in lifting my mother from the bed-chamber to the parlour. Cyril presently descended from his own room, and after breakfast he

produced the eighty pounds, with which my father at once set off to Riverdale, to anticipate the visits of the law. But he had not left the house more than an hour, when a gig drove up to the door, and a couple of men alighted.

Their errand was soon made known: they were sheriff's officers, who had come to put in an execution for fifty seven pounds—another liability, of the close pressure of which we were until this moment all in ignorance. We knew that law proceedings had been taken in the matter; but my father had led us to believe that two or three weeks would yet elapse ere extremities could be had recourse to. It however appeared that by some oversight on the part of the attorney at Riverdale, who was usually employed by my father to stave off the law's evil days,—a judgment had been obtained and signed—execution had immediately issued—and thus, while he was on his way to Riverdale to pay off one liability, the consequences of another came upon us like a thunderbolt. Of course there was no money to meet the demand: and the sheriff's officer, leaving his man in possession, drove away.

Here was a calamity; and how was it possibly to be met? My mother seemed to fall into the stupor of despair: Cyril looked more than ever moody and sombre. With arms folded across his breast he sat in his chair, plunged in the darkest reverie;—while I was so excited and so bewildered with anguish and terror, that I knew not what to do. I longed to put on my bonnet and shawl—rush forth from the house—and roam whithersoever my unguided footsteps might take me, so long as I could flee from a thresh-

old which had thus been darkened by the ominous shape of law's myrmidons. But I was compelled to remain at home: for my mother was now in a state which needed all my attention.

In the afternoon my father returned in a half-tipsy condition as usual: but when he learnt that an execution was in the house, he seemed sobered in a minute. I did not anticipate that the intelligence would produce so strong an effect upon him:—and even in the midst of all these bitter trials and sore troubles, it was some little consolation to perceive that he was not quite so hardened and callous as I feared he had become. But what was now to be done? The man might remain in possession a few days,—at the expiration of which, if the money were not forthcoming, the furniture must be sold. My brother offered no suggestion: he remained gloomily, moodily silent. Our father dropped a hint that Cyril might, if he choose, pay another visit to his unknown friend at Riverdale: but my brother shook his head abruptly—almost fiercely; and my father doubtless saw it was useless to press the point.

Several days passed; and nothing was done towards the settlement of the liability: indeed there seemed nothing that could be done. Methought that Cyril felt even more than any of us, the disgrace and ignominy which had already overtaken us, as well as the prospect of utter ruin which we had before us. He seemed completely broken down—utterly spirit-crushed. Those few days had worked the effect of weeks and months of grief upon Cyril! He grew visibly attenuated—haggard—careworn—ghastly,—and nervous too: for at every

knock at the door he would fly to the window and look forth to see who was coming.

"Poor Cyril!" I said to myself; he is in hourly—indeed momentary anticipation of fresh calamities. And no wonder! for they appear to be falling thick as snow flakes upon our heads."

At length the sheriff's officer came with the auctioneer's man to take the inventory and ticket the goods, preparatory to the sale, which was to take place on the ensuing day. Since the execution was first put in, I had not once crossed the threshold of the house: I knew that the report must be all over the village—and I was ashamed to issue forth. But now that this process of making the inventory and ticketing all our little articles of furniture, was going on, I felt as if despair were rendering me mad—as if my brain were turning under the influence of an ineffable anguish. I longed for fresh air. The weather was again clear and frosty; and I felt that I must go out, if only for a few minutes—or that I should be stifled in-doors. I asked Cyril to accompany me; but he only shook his head by way of refusal; and I went forth alone.

Hurrying away from the village, I struck into a by-lane: but scarcely had I entered it when I heard hasty footsteps following close behind: and looking back—with the idea that perhaps it was Cyril, who on second thoughts had chosen to accompany me—I immediately recognised Horace Rockingham's valet, whom I had often seen when at parties at Hawthorn Hall. He was a man of about thirty—excessively neat in his personal appearance—but one whose look had never pleased me. Though profoundly respectful, he had a sort of hypocritical

manner about him, which created the impression that he was not sincere; and there was also something sinister in his eyes, which aggravated the unfavourable notion thus conveyed with regard to his true character. I was convinced, the instant I thus saw him following me, that he had some letter or message from his young master: and I felt my blood crimsoning and burning on my cheeks at the bare thought of receiving any fresh impertinence from Horatio Rockingham—especially through the medium of a lacquey! I quickened my pace: but the man speedily overtook me; and touching his hat he said, "Miss Lambert, I beg your pardon for intruding upon you, but I have a note to deliver—"

"A note! from whom?" I demanded, stopping short, and flinging an indignant look upon the menial.

"From Mr. Horace," was the answer: and he produced a note at the same time.

"Mr. Horace Rockingham," I said, "dares to send a note in a stealthy manner to me?"—and I drew myself up with no assumed air of offended dignity, but with all the genuine sincerity of that feeling.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," the valet at once replied: "but I am only acting in obedience to the commands of my master. I hope you will listen for a few moments to what I have to say, as it is perhaps of more importance than you may imagine. At least so Mr. Horace gave me to understand."

"Proceed," I said, now trembling all over, as the wild hope shot through my heart that perhaps Horace had made up his mind to proffer honourable proposals after all—in which case I should cer-

tainly have given an assent, notwithstanding all his past conduct: for under the circumstances in which our family was placed, the workhouse really seemed to be about to open its portals to receive us.

"Mr. Horace strictly enjoined me," resumed the valet, "that I was only to deliver this note into your hand—and to do so unperceived by any third person. I have been watching an opportunity for some days past; and now that I am fortunate enough to find it, I hope you will not fail, Miss Lambert, to read the note: for I again assure you that it is of the utmost importance."

"Give me the note!" I said, scarcely knowing what I was doing or what words I was speaking; and having taken the billet from his hand, I hurried on a few paces; then stopping short, I tore open the missive, and read the contents in the following manner:

"Something has transpired which renders it absolutely necessary that I should have five minutes' conversation with you. What this *something* is, I will not commit to paper; and when we meet, you will thank me with fervid gratitude for this caution on my part. But do not imagine that I am calling in to requisition a mere subterfuge for the purpose of obtaining an interview with you. As there is a heaven above me, I am only recording the truth when I declare that the matter to which I allude is of the most vital importance to yourself and those connected with you. If you treat this letter with scorn and contempt—bitterly, bitterly will you have to repent of your conduct!

"It may seem indelicate that I entrust the note to my valet

Terence: but in the first place he is entirely trustworthy—and in the second place the fact of his loitering about the village in the hope of seeing you will not attract notice, whereas it would be altogether different if I myself were to remain on the watch.

"Again I conjure you—for your own sake, and for that of those who are nearest and dearest to you—not to hesitate nor fail to give me a few minutes' interview. Let it be where you will, and at what hour you may choose to appoint: only beware how you treat this missive otherwise than with the attention it demands.

"H.R."

I was completely bewildered by the contents of the billet. To a certain degree they seemed to corroborate that wild hope which had sprung up in my mind: but on the other hand, there was something mysteriously dark, as well as menacing and peremptory in the tenour of the language. Yet on glancing again at it, methought, that perhaps he meant to bid me beware how I rashly refused him an opportunity of making amends for the past, and thereby saving my family from the ruin which was hanging over us. Yes—I resolved that I would give the appointment that was solicited. But it could not take place on this same day: it was now two o'clock—the valet would have to return to the Hall and see his master: in that November season the dusk set in early: and not for worlds would I have the villagers notice that I went forth in a stealthy manner when the veil of darkness was closing in upon the earth. The appointment must therefore be for the morrow, and during the broad day-light.

"Terence," I said, beckoning towards me the valet, who had remained standing at a little distance while I read the note and reflected upon its contents—"tell your master that to-morrow, precisely at the hour of noon, I will be at the cross-road at the end of this lane. You know it? It is about half-a-mile distant."

"Your message, Miss Lambert, shall be delivered," returned the valet; and with another touch of the hat he hastened away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FOUR GUILTY ONES.

Not a syllable did I breathe, on my return home, of the missive which had been sent to me, nor of the appointment which I had just given. There was hope in my heart: but I did not suffer its light to appear upon my countenance: I would not encourage a feeling on the part of my parents or brother which might be doomed to the bitterest disappointment. Nor, as the day wore on, did I myself continue to cling with a very strong tenacity to that hope: nay, sad experiences of the world's misfortunes, and likewise of its villanies, had rendered me mistrustful and suspicious. There were even moments when I regretted having made the appointment at all, and when I thought that it would be better not to keep it, inasmuch as perhaps Horace Rockingham's sole object might be to renew his infamous proposals as a condition upon which his purse would furnish funds for the settlement of all my father's liabilities. It was therefore in a state of bewildering uncertainty that I retired to rest that night; and hours elapsed ere sleep visited my eyes—hours of

the most painful reflections, in which the hope of the day had dwindled and diminished down to as feeble a thread of light as that which the first glimmering of dawn sheds through the casement.

When the morning came, I rose in a condition of nervous excitement: for this was the day on which the sale was to take place. And how would that day end? Was it to behold us utterly divested of all our little furniture—our very beds taken away from us—my paralyzed, invalid mother to be left naught whereon to repose her limbs—our name a byword and a scandal throughout the village—and, in short, the vertex of utter ruin engulfing us all? Or would that day behold a sudden change in our position? Was it possible that better feelings had sprung up in the heart of Horatio Rockingham—that he was really inspired by a strong affection towards me, to make honourable atonement for past outrages and insults—and that by his entreaties and prayers he had moved his father to give an assent to our marriage? Oh, if all this could but take place! But then why not have written explicitly and fully in his letter? wherefore have penned its contents in so mystical a strain? and what could that important topic be, to which he dared not allude in a written missive, and for which amount of caution I should express such fervent gratitude? I was bewildered how to act; and that bewilderment was painful to a degree.

When I met my parents and my brother at the breakfast-table, a glance showed me how deeply they also were suffering. But little was spoken: they looked ominously and gloomily at each other. I longed to tell them everything which had at any time

passed between me and Horace—to show them the note—to confess the appointment which I had made—and to ask their counsel whether I should keep it. But again I reflected that I ought not to encourage a hope which might be fearfully disappointed; I dared not, in the chafed condition of my brother's spirit, incur the risk of goading him all the more maddeningly by the tale of the past, and by what might possibly occur at the interview which I had agreed to afford Horace Rockingham. Therefore I held my peace: and still was I in a state of uncertainty whether to keep the appointment or not.

Soon after ten o'clock the auctioneer arrived: bills announcing the sale were placed in the windows; several carts and gigs came one after another, bringing furniture-brokers from Riverdale to bid for the goods; and some of the villagers likewise began to gather in groups near the house. The sale was to commence at eleven,—just before which our Cyril suddenly put on his hat, and exclaiming with a sort of wild desperation, "By heaven, I cannot endure this spectacle!" he rushed into the back garden, where he paced to and fro with rapid and uneven steps. My mother remained in her bed-chamber, where I also stayed in order to be with her. As for my father, he walked about from room to room like one whose senses were abandoning him:—sometimes I heard him chuckling in an unnatural manner, as if he said to himself, "Now at least they are doing their worst!"—and sometimes giving vent to a conclusive sob.

The sale commenced in the parlour; and as the voices of the auctioneer and the bidders reached the room where I was seated

with my mother, I beheld the tears trickling down her cheeks. Oh ! then I forgot the base fraud which she had committed towards her sister—I forgot the loss of respect which since the discovery thereof I had experienced for her—I thought only of the kindness which in earlier years I had received at her hands—and flinging my arms about her neck, I besought her to be comforted. But she only wept all the more bitterly. My father entered : he likewise began sobbing and crying like a child. I was unable to endure the sight—and rushed from the chamber. As I glanced at the clock in the passage, I perceived that it only wanted twenty minutes to twelve. I sped up to my own room—put on my bonnet and shawl—descended quickly again—and issued forth from the house.

"At all events," I murmured to myself, in a fit of utter desperation, "I can but hear what Horace may have to say to me. If his proposal be honourable I will accept it : if it be infamous, I will reject it. And though in this latter case the ordeal will be planting a fresh dagger in my heart yet it cannot aggravate the stern reality of those tangible and palpable misfortunes which are so quickly closing in around us."

The lane was reached. I looked behind me to see whether my father or Cyril were following : but no one was in sight. I proceeded hastily along ; and as the clock of the village-church proclaimed the hour of noon, I reached the place of appointment. Horace Rockingham was there, waiting for me ; and at a distance of about two hundred yards I perceived his handsome curriole-and-pair,—the coachman sitting

up on the box, his back being towards the spot where I thus encountered his master. With a rapidly searching glance did I endeavour to gather from the youth's features whether I might entertain hope, or whether I must expect a renewal of the infamous overtures which he had previously made. But the expression of that delicate countenance was at the moment inscrutable : it was that of a cold firmness—and was even of a more manly character than any which I had ever seen those effeminate features wear before. As for myself, I was trembling nervously : I felt the colour coming and going in rapid transitions upon my cheeks ; I strove every nerve to assume an air of calm and modest dignity—but such was my excitement, that I must have appeared full of bewilderment and confusion.

"Miss Lambert," said Horace, not offering to take my hand—nor making the slightest advance which could be construed either into an impulse of honourable intention or of libertine insolence : "It is well that you have kept the appointment, as you will presently see. I do not propose to use more words than are necessary. I have a brief tale to tell—for which I claim your attention ; and then matters may be speedily settled between us."

He paused for a moment. I spoke not a syllable : I was trembling with the cruellest suspense,—hope mingling with apprehension but the latter paramount.

"A few days ago," resumed Horace, speaking with the glacial severity of one who felt that he had the power to assume a high and authoritative position, "I was invited to dine with Mr. Pembroke, the banker of Riverdale.

I accepted that invitation: my father being somewhat indisposed, was unable to accompany me. As the evening was clear and starlit, I proceeded to Mr. Pembroke's house in that open phaeton which you see yonder; and the same coachman whom you observe there, drove it. We left the banker's house to return to the Hall a little before midnight. You are aware perhaps that there is a portion of the road which runs between deep cuttings, and therefore has high and almost perpendicular walls of mingled chalk and clay on either side. There, in that lonely and darksome part, the vehicle was suddenly stopped by a man wearing a peasant's smock, and with a black mask upon his countenance. With a desperate blow he struck the coachman from his seat,—levelling him senseless upon the road. Quick as the eye can wink, the ruffian next sprang upon me. I could not wrestle with him. You know, Miss Lambert, I am but a boy," continued Horace, with a bitter biting sarcasm in his accents; "and the strength of a boy was as naught against that of a strong and desperate man. I gave him up my purse, which happened to contain a considerable sum of money. The robber fled like the wind: but even in the excitement of a scene which only lasted for a couple of minutes at the very outside, I recognised him. Yes—I knew who that individual was, though the black mask covered his countenance and the peasant's smock was over his broadcloth clothes—I knew him, I say—and you know him also—for that man was your own brother!"

"Holy God!" I murmured: and as a dimness suddenly came upon my eyes, I was about to sink down in a swoon, when Horace caught

me with such abrupt violence that I was in an instant recalled thoroughly to myself,—startled as it were back again into a horribly poignant sense of completest consciousness.

"Control your feelings as well as you can," said Horace, as he thus prevented me from falling; for our colloquy is to be short:—and as he thus spoke, he unwound his arms from my waist; and again we stood confronting each other,—his countenance now displaying the incipient gleam of a fiendish triumph,—mine (for I felt it to be so) ghastly white, and distorted with the excruciating anguish which filled my soul. "Yes," he continued, "the midnight robber was your own brother. My purse contained eighty pounds—"

"O God!" I again murmured, smitten with a horrible conviction that the frightful tale was indeed too true: for that was the exact sum which the miserable young man had pretended to have received from his fictitious friend at Riverdale.

"Ah!" observed Horace, with an increasing expression of sardonic satisfaction: "circumstances tell you that every syllable I am speaking is the tremendous truth! Well, but listen; and see how generously I have behaved in the matter—see how immense has been my forbearance—and then express your gratitude as best you may. When your brother fled, having plundered me of my purse, the coachman recovered from the effects of the blow he had received: and fortunately there were no visible traces thereof. I enjoined him to keep the affair a profound secret,—alleging as a reason that we should both be laughed at as arrant cowards for having offered

no resistance to the single individual who thus waylaid and stopped us. The fellow has implicitly obeyed my instructions ; and never as the incident passed his lips. Now you comprehend wherefore I would not commit to paper an occurrence which so vitally concerns your brother, your parents, and yourself. I bade my valet Torence deliver a certain verbal message in order to induce you to read my note ; but not even to him did I explain the significance of the words I thus commanded him to speak. Now, Rose, need I say more ? You comprehend my motives in having shown so much forbearance ; and you must be prepared to give me the reward."

"Horace—Mr. Rockingham," I exclaimed, looking and speaking as if I were frantic ; "I implore you—I conjure you—"

"Hush, Rose ! it is too late for prayers and entreaties !"—and as he thus interrupted me, his looks expressed a demoniac implacability mingled with the fiercest fires of licentious passion ; so that it seemed as if Satan himself had suddenly taken possession of the fragile and effeminate form of that vile young man. "I know the vertex of miseries into which your family is plunged—I know that at this very instant the sale of your effects is progressing. But look here !" and as he spoke, he drew from his pocket a bundle of bank-notes. "Even while claiming a reward for my generous forbearance towards your brother, I do not mean that it shall balance accounts. No : here are five hundred pounds,—they are yours—"

"Never, never !" I shrieked forth, in tones so piercing that the coachman on the box of the carriage looked round in sudden alarm.

"Silence, insensate girl that you are !" exclaimed Horace, his eyes flashing fire—while at the same time he waved his hand with vehemence towards the coachman, as if to command him to avert his looks again. "I have but a few words more to say—and those are to place before you two alternatives for your contemplation."

"Horace," I said, in the low deep tones of ineffable agony, "if ever I have offended you—if ever I have seemed to insult you—I implore your pardon—I beseech your mercy—On my knees do I beseech it—but spare me !"

"No, no !" he ejaculated, as he caught me forcibly by the arms to prevent me from sinking down to the suppliant posture which I was about to assume : "you must not kneel—it is useless !"

"Are you implacable ?" I asked, shuddering coldly all over ; and there was madness in my Brain.

Yes—implacable !" he responded : and his voice, naturally so harmonious, sounded upon my ears as if fraught with the terrible harshness and discordancy of that of a fiend. "Listen to the alternatives. One is that I go hence to obtain a warrant for the prompt arrest of the midnight robber : the other is that you suffer me to lead you to that carriage, which will bear us to Riverdale—and there—"

"Enough, vile boy—enough !" I shrieked forth ; and then I wrung my hands in the very bitterness of my despair.

"Ah ! boy again !" ejaculated Horace fiercely. Oh, but this is the day alike of love and vengeance !"—and his voice swelled with a thrilling exultation. "Now, Rose, I give you but a minute to decide. Away with me!—or within the hour that is passing the officers of justice will be at your house—your brother will be captured

as a felon—hains will be placed upon his wrists—”

“No, no!” I exclaimed wildly: “anything—everything but *that*!”—and I fainted in the arms of Horace Rockingham.

When I came to myself, I was seated by his side in the curricie, which was speeding rapidly towards the town of Riverdale, the outskirts of which were already close at hand.

* * * * *

Some hours had passed: it was six o'clock in the evening—a cold dark wintry evening of November—when I alighted, or was rather lifted out of the curricie by Horace Rockingham, with in a hundred yards of the parsonage-house. There was a delirium in my brain—and methought it was all a dream.

“Farewell, sweet Rose, for the present. Tell the best tale you can devise for your prolonged absence and for the possession of that money. Fail not to write to me to-morrow, as I have suggested—to let me know whether or not you will accompany me to London. If you decide in the affirmative, I will fulfil all my promises: if in the negative, no matter—the secret of everything shall be faithfully and honourably kept.”

These were the words which were whispered in my ear by Horace Rockingham, as he drew me to a short distance from the curricie; and his arm was round my waist. Darkness enveloped us; and when he first began speaking, I still thought it was all a horrible dream: but, as he went on the conviction stole into my mind that it was a hideous, terrible reality—and if his arm had not sustained me, I should have

sunk upon the ground, I was on the point of murmuring something—I cannot remember what, even if I knew at the time! but my voice was choked—I was well nigh suffocated with the awful, horrible excruciating feelings that were swelling in my heart.

“Farewell, sweet Rose!”—and the vile youth’s lips were pressed to mine.

The next moment I was alone; and the sounds of the retreating curricie came upon my ears through the gloomy darkness of the November evening. I tottered forward: I staggered about like one inebriated: my head seemed to be whirling round; there was frenzy in my brain—despair in my heart. Mechanically I advanced towards the parsonage-house: but as I drew nearer, the intense poignancy of my feelings yielded rapidly to a sort of numbing stupor: madness gave place to an awful dismay: I went on as if in a dream and under the influence of a tremendous consternation. I had no power for deliberate reflection. If I had, I believe that I should have rushed away to the river which flowed close at hand—and should have plunged into its dark depths, to seek those still darker and more mysterious profundities which lie beyond the confines of this world. But I had not the power nor sense sufficient even for suicide.

I tottered up to the front door of the parsonage-house. All appeared silent within: but through a crevice in the parlour-shutters a feeble light glimmered forth, resembling dimly-illuminated threads. I knocked at the door: it was opened by my brother: and I started as if suddenly galvanized at the sound of his voice, as he exclaimed, “Is that you, Rose?”

Good heavens! where have you been?"

Yes—I started, because all in an instant the thought flashed to my recollection that this brother of mine was a criminal, and that it was to save him from the consequences of his deep iniquity I had become what I was. There was no light in the passage: he could not therefore see my countenance; and astonished that I thus stopped suddenly short and spoke no word, he said with impetuous haste, "Tell me, Rose—where have you been? what has detained you thus?"

Still I gave no answer: but, entering the house, followed Cyril into the parlour. Ah, the parlour! it was now utterly denuded of all its furniture and effects—with the exception of the family bible and the easy-chair in which my mother sat and which had either been left her from motives of compassion, or else had been bought in by some sympathizing neighbour. And there—in that chair, sat my mother, looking, horribly careworn, with her peaked, angular, elongated countenance; but now her keen eyes rested searchingly upon me as I slowly walked into the room as if I were only the phantom of my own real self. My father stood leaning against the mantel, and his looks also settled upon me. He was not tipsy now: instead of the flush of strong drink upon his countenance, there was a dead pallor: his form seemed to have become suddenly bowed—his hair actually appeared to me whiter than it was when I left the house a few hours back. No—he was *not* completely callous nor hardened: he was not so utterly spoiled by misfortune and intemperance as to be altogether indifferent. On the contrary, his aspect denoted the mingled humiliation and contri-

tion of a wretched conscience-stricken old man. And Cyril,—he likewise was horribly pale—he likewise was frightfully careworn: his cheeks were hollow and haggard—but his eyes seemed to shine with a strange sinister light as they were fixed scrutinizingly upon me. It was evident that my parents and brother liked not the mystery of my prolonged absence; and that there was little to reassure them in my own looks or demeanour as I slowly entered the room.

Then, everything is gone?" I said, in a low mournful voice, as my eyes swept around the bare walls.

"Everything but that book, that chair, and a little bedding," replied Cyril, who hastily answered my question. "But tell us, Rose,—No, no! tell us nothing?" he ejaculated vehemently: and I saw that he was smitten with some horrible suspicion. "Come with me, sister! I wish to speak to you alone."

"Why take her forth?" cried my mother, in her sharp querulous tones. "Rose, where have you been? Speak!"

"Ah, I recollect!" I said: and my manner must have seemed singularly wild and listless; "I have something which will soon fill these apartments again"—and as I thus spoke, I drew forth a roll of banknotes which at the instant I remembered to be in the bosom of my dress.

"What is that?" exclaimed my father. "Notes?"

"Money?" shrieked my mother.

"Rose, Rose!" cried Cyril, in accents of wildest despair.

"Yes." I said and at the moment I was singularly, unnaturally apathetic: "there ought to be five hundred pounds there."

"Five hundred pounds!" exclaimed my father.

"Horror!" screamed my mother.

"Rose, tell us," cried Cyril, his countenance convulsed with a maddening anguish,— "say but one word—only one word—to convince us that you have not—"

"Do not all cry out at me thus," I exclaimed, now experiencing a sudden and strong revulsion of feeling from a sort of stupid apathy to a goading sense of my terrible position. "Have you not all, one after the other, tried your own resources? You, father, plundered the farmer of the tithe-money—you, mother, committed a fraud on your sister—you, Cyril, robbed a carriage on the highway—and what was left for me to do but sell my virtue?"

Never can I forget the awful, horrible, dreadful scene which was then passing. I had spoken in a sort of uncontrollable frenzy: I was mad at the time. My brother shrank back in mingled horror and despair: my father fell upon his knees, murmuring, "My God! my God! I am righteously punished"—and in respect to my mother, the spell of paralysis was all in an instant broken—she rose from her seat—she stood erect—the cloak which she habitually wore to enwrap her in the winter-time, falling back from her shoulders; and thus, like a ghastly hideous corpse standing forth from its grave clothes, she extended her skinny, lank arms, crying, "May heaven's vengeance fall with its most withering, blighting, blasting effect upon him who has robbed thee, my child, of the purity,"

Then I fell down upon my knees, and torrents of tears gushed forth from my eyes. Oh, the crucifixion of anguish which I then endured—Oh, the horrible tortures which rent my soul! But I was suddenly startled up by a loud cry which burst from Cyril's

lips: my mother was falling forward. He rushed to catch her—but too late; and she dropped senseless upon the bare carpetless floor. Cyril raised her in his arms: she soon opened her eyes; but the instant they encountered my ghastly-pale features, they were averted with even an expression of loathing; and she cried vehemently "Out of my sight! begone!"

"No, no, mother!" exclaimed Cyril: but I waited to hear no more. The backs of my father and brother were turned towards me, as they were at the moment placing my mother again in her chair—so that I slipped from the room unperceived by them. The front door stood half open, as it had been left on my entrance: and I rushed out into the darkness of the night. On I sped as if flying from the very plague itself: on I went, the horrible state of my feelings seeming to lend wings to my feet. I had no fixed purpose in taking any particular direction; but I mechanically turned into that very lane which led to the noon-days's place of appointment. I continued to speed onward through the almost complete obscurity of the evening, until at length I sank exhausted by the way-side. Then again from my eyes flowed the floods of tears: I wrung my hands in bitterest anguish—I was a prey to the wildest despair. Suddenly from a distance it seemed as if I heard my brother's voice calling after me: I started up again, and fled precipitately. No—not for worlds could I return to that home on which I had brought the crowing infamy! not for worlds could I go back to that threshold whence my own mother had told me to begone! I was now in the main road: and I hurried onward with frantic swiftness. But not towards

Riverdale—much less towards Hawthorn Hall—was my direction taken! it was the contrary way which I pursued. In this manner did I proceed until I again sank down through sheer exhaustion.

After a little while my mind became somewhat more calm; and I had just begun to ask myself what I should do, when the sounds of some equipage approaching reached my ears. I looked in the direction whence it came—and perceived two lights, evidently the lamps of some chaise or carriage, rapidly drawing near, and proceeding the same way which I had been taking previous to my halt. It was dashing past: I saw that it was a travelling-carriage drawn by four horses,—when, as the full glare of the nearest lamp was thrown upon me, a gentleman thrust forth his head from the window and called to the postillions to stop. This command was immediately obeyed: the door of the vehicle was thrown open—and its occupant (the gentleman alluded to) sprang forth.

"What ails you? are you ill?" he said, speaking in a kind tone.

"Yes—no, sir—thank you—there is nothing the matter with me," I murmuringly stammered forth: and then my bosom was convulsed with audible sobs.

"I thought by the sudden glimpse I caught of you, that you were no common person," said the gentleman? "and I now see that you are not. You are evidently in great distress of mind."

"Yes, sir. But pray leave me!" I answered in despair "Leave a wretched creature to herself!"

"No—that cannot be," he said, taking my hand and looking more closely and earnestly in my face "there is something wrong

and unnatural in all this. I would not for the world desert you. Pray tell me if I can convey you to your home."

"Home, sir?" I repeated, with a frenzied start: "I have no home! Ere now I abandoned that which was my home—never, never to return to it!"

"Then I must find you one," said the stranger. Permit me to assist you into the carriage, and as we proceed along, you shall tell me just as much as you choose of the circumstances which have rendered you thus homeless. But if you tell me nothing at all, I will not the less assist you."

"I beg and implore, sir, that you will leave me where I am," I said, hastily snatching back the hand which he had kindly taken: then, instantaneously feeling that I had been guilty of an ungracious as well as ungrateful action, I observed, "Accept my sincerest thanks for your goodness: but—"

"I can listen to no remonstrance," he said, firmly. "I find you here, in circumstances which justify my interference. It would be downright murder on my part to abandon you to the cold night air."

This remark rendered me all in an instant more keenly alive than I even previously was, to the horrors of my position. Where was I to sleep that night? where was I to repose my weary limbs—my aching head? I had not a farthing in my pocket: the whole amount purchased by the sale of my virtue, had been left at the parsonage. While I was thus hesitating and deliberating, the gentleman raised me gently from the roadside, and conducted me to the carriage, in which I suffered him to place me, I no longer offering

the slightest resistance. Then the equipage dashed along; and for some minutes a profound silence reigned inside.

My mind was now growing calmer still; and if I were touched by the benevolent conduct of him whom accident had thus rendered my companion, I was not the less sensible of that delicacy on his part which left me to my own meditations and to the recovery of my composure, without obtruding those queries which curiosity might so naturally have dictated. I felt too that some explanation was due to this benevolent stranger: but I likewise felt that I was far too wretched and miserable to give it.

"Sir," I said, at length breaking silence, "your noble treatment of a friendless young woman merits the sincerest gratitude:"—but here I stopped short, and again burst into tears.

"I can well appreciate all that your heart would prompt your lips to express," he said: "but I beg of you not to give utterance to a word that may reawaken your affliction, whatever its source may be. I am proceeding to London—but intend to halt, about ten clock at some hotel, where it is my purpose to pass the night. There I will consign you to the landlady; and to-morrow, when your mind is more calm, you will perhaps be enabled to tell me how I may serve your farther. And now not another word of thanks!" he hastened to add: "but treat me as if you had known me all your life. Do not therefore consider yourself under any obligation to me."

I had begun to murmur a few words renewing the expression of my gratitude, when he thus silenced me; and nothing more was spoken for a long time. My

thought reverted painfully to the home from which I was now an exile: but I could not help reflecting that it was perhaps better, whatever my own destiny might be, that I should thus have abruptly quitted that home; for how could I ever again anticipate peace or comfort in the presence of those in whose countenances, it would be impossible to look without a blush, and who could not look upon me without an equal reddening of shame? Had I not proclaimed aloud the catalogue of our iniquities? had I not addressed my father as I cheat—my mother as a fraudulent strategist—my brother as a highway robber? had I not thus plainly told them that all their misdeeds were known to me? and had I not wound up the fearful list by declaring my own loss of virtue? Oh, in that moment when frenzy sent forth those fearful proclamations from my lips, all family ties were in an instant severed—all the dearest and tenderest bonds which had previously held us together were cut in twain, as the band which binds up a sheaf is torn asunder by the rude hand of the thresher. How, then, was it possible that I could have remained in my home, even if my mother's frantic command had not gone forth, banishing me from her sight? But, Oh! that command—it continued to thrill through my brain—it continued to vibrate in my heart—it continued to echo in my soul: for those were words which, once heard, could never be forgotten!

The travelling carriage pursued its way: an hour had passed since I became one of its occupants: and now it stopped to change horses. My stranger-companion courteously and kind-

ly asked me if I would take some refreshment ; but I wanted none. I saw that by the glare which was poured into the carriage by the lamp of the hotel where the fresh relay was thus obtained he studied me with considerable attention—yet not with rudeness, nor in a manner to deteriorate from the generosity of the deed which he had done in respect to me. The carriage rolled on again : we still continued silent—for I had no inclination to converse ; and my companion was evidently of too great a delicacy of feeling to intrude upon my thoughts. But time was wearing on ; and we were now approaching the town where the night was to be passed.

"Perhaps," said my companion, at length feeling it necessary to break the long silence which had prevailed, "it will be better for you to pass as a relation of mine at the hotel where we shall soon stop. These postillions who are driving us now know nothing of the circumstance under which you became one of the occupants of the carriage : therefore, they can report nothing disagreeable at our halting-place. It may be as well for you to be informed that my name is Alvanly, and that I am a Member of Parliament. If you think fit to adopt this name for the presence, and therefore pass as my relation—sister or cousin, whatever you choose—it will silence gossiping tongues at the hotel."

I thanked my companion for the considerate delicacy of the hints which he had thrown out ; and I now comprehended wherefore he had studied me with some degree of attention by the light of the lamp at the place where we changed horses. He evidently

sought to ascertain whether, by my personal appearance—my apparel—and so forth, I might be passed off as a lady ; and it was evident he was satisfied with the result of that survey. Under these circuitous stances the hotel was reached : he assisted me to alight, and immediately upon entering, he said to the mistress of the establishment, "This young lady—my relative—is very much indisposed : let her be shown at once to a chamber, and every attention be afforded her."

I was accordingly conducted to a room, where I lost no time in getting to bed : for I was thoroughly worn out both in mind and body. Though I slept soundly, yet wild and horrible dreams haunted me throughout the night ; and conspicuous amongst all the images thus conjured up was that of Horace Rockingham, whose shape appeared to assume by turns the most ghastly, terrible, and hideous aspects. I awoke with a bad headache : but after being up a little while, the physical pain passed away. Would to heaven that the mental pain which was rankling in my soul could have been dissipated with equal facility.

The mistress of the hotel came herself to the room, bringing me all the necessaries for my toilet ; and from what she said, I discovered that my stranger-benefactor had, with that delicate consideration which was evidently characteristic of him, devised a tale of my trunk having been accidentally left behind. I was asked whether I preferred taking breakfast in my own chamber—or whether I would join Mr. Alvanly in the sitting-room. I was about to decide upon the former, when it struck me that such a proceeding would appear

ungracious: and I therefore answered in favour of the latter. While performing my toilet, I saw that I was looking very pale and ill—but yet not quite so bad as might have been expected after all I had gone through on the preceding day. I descended to the sitting-room, where Mr. Alvanly was waiting to receive me; and we sat down to breakfast. In the trouble of my mind on the preceding evening I had been enabled to take such little notice of him—and indeed had but such transient opportunities of doing so, these only being when a light was thrown into the carriage, and when we descended at the hotel—that I really had but a vague idea of his personal appearance until I now found myself in his company in the morning. He was a gentleman of about thirty—genteel looking—but by no means handsome. He had hair and whiskers which were so closely bordering upon red that they could only by a courteous fiction or an overstrained compliment be denominated auburn. His eyes were of a light blue: his face was pale—and instead of having the thoughtful gravity which my imagination had associated with the idea of a legislator, was remarkably inexpressive, even to inaneness. He was tall and somewhat slender—very elegantly dressed—and, at a first glance, evidently somewhat vain and conceited. But he possessed an agreeable voice and pleasing manners: as for his delicacy of feeling, I had already received what I considered to be ample proofs of it; and the reader may be assured that I was not many moments in his company on this particular morning ere I expressed my heartfelt gratitude. He again cut me short, and instantaneously turned

the conversation upon general topics, as if to convince me that he did not seek to penetrate into my circumstances until such time as I might choose to volunteer explanations.

Immediately after breakfast Mr. Alvanly rang the bell, called for the bill, and ordered the travelling carriage to be got on in readiness. I naturally shrank with instinctive modesty and bashfulness from the idea of continuing any longer a burden upon his generosity, as well as of travelling in a false and dubious position with him. I knew not, however, in what terms to commence an expression of these sentiments: but he no doubt, judged from my confusion what was passing in my mind—for he said—"It is not here that we can deliberate upon whatsoever may presently have to be discussed between us. You came hither as my relative, you must go away as such—even if you bid me farewell at the next town."

I offered no remonstrance to those observations; and in the course of a few minutes was once more seated by his side in the carriage. But now I felt it was absolutely necessary that I should give him some explanations: he had a right to expect them at my hand. Yet what could I say? Reveal everything that had occurred? No—impossible! for that would be to proclaim my brother a robber, to save whom from a felon's fate I had sold my virtue!

"Miss Alvanly," said my companion,—“for by that name must I call you, until you choose to mention some other—whether your own or a feigned one, it matters no—”

"Oh, sir!" I exclaimed, while tears started forth from my eyes; "You must be dealt with candidly

by me. My name is Lambert—Rosa Lambert—and I am the daughter of the Vicar of Hawthorn. Circumstances—”

“Permit me, Miss Lambert,” interrupted Mr. Alvanly, “to say something which may possibly spare you the pain of those explanations which you are evidently kind enough to have the purpose of giving me. If I mistake not,” he went on gently and even hesitatingly to observe, “you must have quitted your home through some family quarrel—”

“Yes, Yes, sir!” I ejaculated with a sudden access of excitement; “my mother ordered me presence! she bade me from her to be gone!”

“Enough, Miss Lambert, I think that I comprehend you.”—then as the tell-tale blush mantled in deepest crimson upon my countenance, he went on to say, “We are not at all faultless in this world; and without another syllable of preface let us proceed to discuss what can be done for you. Now you must suffer me to observe that circumstances have given me a right to dictate somewhat to you. Therefore I propose—nay, indeed, I insist that you accompany me to London. Excuse me for adding that I am not a married man; and consequently there is no wife’s feelings which can be at all chafed or vexed by the knowledge that incident has made you my traveling companion. When in London, you shall have apartments provided for you; and as your mind becomes somewhat more settled, you will be the better enabled—”

Oh, “Mr. Alvanly!” I exclaimed “rest assured that so soon as we reach the metropolis, I shall cease to be a burthen upon your noble generosity! I have erred—frankly I confess that I have erred,” I

went on to say, with averted looks and with the crimson glow again mantling and burning upon my countenance: “but heaven is my witness that it was through no willing frailty on my part!”

“I comprehend, Miss Lambert,” observed my companion softly: it was treachery. But no more on that subject: let us continue the discourse upon the topic which was interrupted. I can full well appreciate your anxiety to do something which may earn you a livelihood: but you cannot expect that the moment you alight from my carriage in London a thousand opportunities will present themselves. I have a duty to perform—and it shall be done. Suitable apartments shall be procured for you in a quiet and respectable house: in a few days you will tell me your plans—and amongst the ladies of my acquaintance I may be enabled to advance them, whatsoever they may be. Circumstances have made me your Mentor; and I claim from you the confidence which a sister would bestow upon a brother.”

I wept tears of gratitude; for there seemed to be so much genuine frankness and honest sincerity in my companion’s speech as well as looks, that I really did feel towards him in the sense that he had suggested. He hastened to turn the conversation upon other topics,—asking me if I had ever visited the metropolis, and I answered in the affirmative;—stating that I dwelt there about four years in my childhood previous to the family’s removal to Hawthorn, one hundred and eighty miles distant in a remote corner of Cheshire. But I recollected very little indeed of London, and was of course altogether inexperienced in its wiles, its artifi-

ces and its temptations. Mr. Alvanly proceeded to describe me some of the public buildings; he also gave a sketch of the manners and usages of high-life society; and his conversation was so cheerful, so interesting, and so interspersed with good-humoured sarcasm in respect to the foibles and follies of the fashionable world, that he succeeded in weaning me somewhat from the utter gloom of despondency. Moreover, I did my best to assume as gay an exterior as possible: for I did not choose that, as accident had rendered me his travelling companion, his own spirits should receive a damp from my too bitter affliction.

We pursued our journey until the afternoon,—when we stopped at an hotel to dine; and there we rested a couple of hours. Our way was then pursued again, until about eight in the evening, when we halted for the night. At the hotel where we thus tarried the same considerate delicacy on Mr. Alvanly's part as that which I had before experienced led the landlady to supply me with all that was requisite for my toilet; and retiring to rest early, I passed a far more comfortable night than the previous one. There was a certain point on which my mind experienced considerable relief: it was the knowledge that I had left my parents and brother in the possession of ample funds wherewith to refurnish the parsonage—settle all remaining debts—and wipe away as much as possible the disgrace which had overtaken them. Although that money was the price of my virtue, yet I could not for an instant suppose that my father—blunted as his better feelings had become—would hesitate to make use of it: and it was therefore a consolation

to reflect that instead of having left my family plunged deep down in the very vortex of wretchedness, there were ample resources to enable them to build up a greater degree of prosperity than for many long years they had experienced.

In the morning the journey was resumed after breakfast; and between two and three o'clock on that day the travelling-carriage entered London. Mr. Alvanly informed me that his own house situated in May Fair: but he proposed that instead of proceeding at once thither, we should alight at an hotel, where I might tarry for an hour or two while he went forth to procure me apartments. He had naturally, from circumstances, acquired a certain degree of influence over me in respect to the guidance of my proceedings; and indeed I had so much sisterly confidence in him, that I left myself, altogether at his disposal. The arrangement was accordingly carried out as he had suggested; and after remaining alone at an hotel about for two hours, I was joined by him again. He informed me that he had procured me lodgings in the house of a highly respectable widow, to whom his own housekeeper had recommended him: and as his travelling-carriage had gone to his abode, we proceeded in a hackney-coach to the place of my destination. It was in Queen Square, Bloomsbury that the lodging-house was situated; and on alighting, I was at once received by Mrs. Sherwood, the widow of whom he had spoken. She was a woman of about fifty—had a benevolent look—a mild pleasing tone of voice—a kindness of manner and a most respectable appearance: so that I was well pleased to have obtained apartments beneath such a roof.

But when I found that a very well furnished sitting room on the first floor, with an equally handsome bed-chamber on the next storey, had been engaged for me, I felt vexed and ashamed—though more than ever grateful towards Mr. Alvanly. I knew that for the immediate payment of my rent, and even for my maintenance there, until I could do something to earn my own livelihood, I must be indebted to him; and I was sorry that such expensive apartments had been taken for me—as a single chamber, and that on the highest floor, would have sufficed. But Mr. Alvanly would not listen to anything in the form of remonstrance; and motioning Mrs. Sherwood to leave the sitting-room, to which she had conducted us, he addressed me in these terms:—

“Miss Lambert, you have gone through so much affliction that you must really follow my counsel, and remain perfectly quiet for a short time, in order to compose your mind, without troubling yourself with respect to the future. I have told Mrs. Sherwood that you are a relative of mine, and that sudden misfortunes of a pecuniary character have overtaken you. From all I have heard of her—and from what little we have just seen—I think that she is a kind-hearted person,—and not one at all likely to annoy you with impertinent questions. She herself is a reduced gentle-woman, and ekes out, by letting these rooms, the small means that are left her. There are no other lodgers in the house—and that is an advantage. I shall now bid you farewell for the present. Perhaps you will permit me to call occasionally; and in a little while you will explain to me your views.”

“Oh, sir!” I said, the tears of gratitude chasing each other down my cheeks, “let me explain them at once. I shall not be happy until I eat the bread which is to be earned by my own industry. If I could obtain needle-work, or a situation as a nursery governess—or even as a lady’s-maid—I care not what it is——”

“Well, Miss Lambert,” interrupted Mr. Alvanly, “I will speak to the ladies of my acquaintance; and in a few days will let you know the result. Meanwhile—you remember I claimed of you a sister’s confidence—you must permit me to be your banker.”

Thus speaking, he placed a small packet in my hand,—at the same time shaking that hand warmly but hurriedly; and the next moment the door closed behind him.

CHAPTER V.

MR. ALVANLY.

THE little packet which Mr. Alvanly had left in my hand, contained bank-notes to the amount of thirty pounds. I was shocked at the necessity which compelled me thus to receive pecuniary assistance from a stranger—and that stranger still a young man: but at the same time experienced the deepest gratitude towards him: and my heart swelled with emotions which in themselves were equivalent to a fervent prayer that heaven would reward him for his noble generosity towards me. Having nothing in the shape of apparel but what I actually carried on my back, I that very evening begged Mrs. Sherwood to accompany me to such shops where I had needful purchases to

mas, and she at once complied with my request. I bought myself some very plain but neat and becoming raiment and on the following day commenced busily applying the needle to make up my own clothes. While I was at work, my thoughts constantly travelled to Hawthorn and I frequently found myself weeping so bitterly that I was literally blinded by my tears. The next day, however, found me somewhat more composed in mind: and though when I sat down to work again, my thought still reverted to the far-off village, yet not once did I wish, under existing circumstances, to return thither. No; as I had reasoned to myself in the carriage, I felt assured, it was much better that I should have quitted my home, even if it were for ever:—but still it was with a swelling heart that I thought of those whom I had left behind!

On this second day after my installation in my lodgings, Mr. Alvanly called; and in the course of conversation he informed me that he had spoken to some ladies of his acquaintance on my behalf, and that they had promised to think over the matter and see how my views could in any way be forwarded. He remained about three quarters of an hour, and then took his departure. On the following day he did not make his appearance—nor indeed did I expect him: I could not possibly think that he had as yet heard anything favourable, or that he would spare the time to call unless he had. But on the next day he repeated his visit; and expressed himself much delighted to perceive that I was looking in better health than when first arriving in London. He said that his lady friends had not as yet succeeded in chalking

out anything for my future career; but that my case was not forgotten by them. On this occasion he remained about an hour and a half,—his manner all the while being kindly, courteous and perfectly respectful. To be brief, he called every other day for about a fortnight: but still nothing was as yet done to forward my views.

"I am afraid, Mr. Alvanly," I at length said, "I am giving you a great deal of trouble; and I am the more afflicted because I do so much wish to commence earning my own livelihood."

"All along, Miss Lambert," was his response, "I have spoken to you with the frankness of a brother; and I intend to do so now. The truth is, I began to discern something which I did not think of at first. Pardon me for inflicting pain on you by the explanation I am about to give; but you would not thank me, if I were deficient in candour. Your own good sense will tell you that it is not an easy thing for an unmarried man—who is not very old either—to procure the interest of ladies on behalf of a young female whom he earnestly recommends to their notice. The world is so suspicious—Ah! I see that I have spoken too frankly!"

"No, no, sir!" I exclaimed, feeling that my cheeks were crimson, because I was painfully struck with the truth of what was conveyed to me in such delicate language. "I thank you most sincerely for your candour. Pray do not let me be a source of trouble or annoyance to you any longer—I have spoken to Mrs. Sherwood—"

"Do not use the terms *trouble* and *annoyance*, Miss Lambert," interrupted Mr. Alvanly. "You *must* know," he added, with emphasis, "that it would be a plea-

sure for me to do whatsoever lies in my power to ease your mind of any care which is pressing upon it. You must have patience: something will turn up—and in the meantime you have at least one friend."

"Yes: but it is impossible," I cried, "that I can continue to be a burthen to you!"

"A burthen—not so, Miss Lambert. I experience the deepest sympathy on your account and—"

But here he stopped short. I felt confused: for an idea which had for some days past been troubling my mind, now came back with redoubled force. It was that I could not with propriety continue to receive the frequent visits of this gentleman: and yet how was it possible that I could throw out the slightest hint to the contrary?—for I lay under such immense obligations towards him.

"Well, Miss Lambert," he suddenly exclaimed, as he rose up from his seat, "I must go and consult once more with my old housekeeper. She will perhaps give some advice that may be beneficial in forwarding your views."

I expressed my gratitude; and Mr. Alvanly took his departure. He had not left me many minutes; when Mrs. Sherwood came up to my room—as indeed she was often wont to do; and sitting down, began to converse. I do not remember how the topic arose—but she got on to an expatiation on Mr. Alvanly's character, which she represented as being noted for benevolence, kindness, and liberality. She also informed me that he was very rich—that he belonged to an excellent family—and was in every particular a highly respectable gentleman. This I had never doubted; and therefore, wondered somewhat

that my landlady should think it needful to pass such an eulogy upon him. She went on talking; and gradually glided into comments upon my own circumstances—telling me that she had spoken to two or three ladies in the Square, but that she could hear of nothing which would in any way advance my views. She invited me to tea with her that evening; and several times launched out into the strain of panegyric in respect to Mr. Alvanly,—giving me, however, to understand that his housekeeper was an old friend of hers: and hence, her intimate knowledge of everything which regarded the object of her eulogies.

On the following forenoon Mr. Alvanly repeated his visit; and this was the first occasion on which he had called for two consecutive days. He said that he had just seen a lady who had faithfully promised to lose no time in providing for me; and this assurance cheered me greatly.

"You have now been more than a fortnight in London, Miss Lambert," he said; "and you have seen nothing of any of the fine sights. I have just been reproaching Mrs. Sherwood for not taking you to some of these public buildings which I endeavoured to describe to you when we were travelling together to London; but the worthy woman assures me that she would not for the world make such a round without a male escort. I have accordingly volunteered my services—my carriage is at the door—and we will all three go out together."

I had no inclination for anything in the shape of amusement; but I knew not how to refuse an offer so courteously made—

couched too in delicate terms—and coming from one to whom I lay under the greatest obligations. I therefore accepted it; and hastened into my chamber to put on my bonnet and shawl. As I looked at myself in the glass, I could not help wondering that I should have so soon recovered all my good looks after the terrible ordeal of trouble through which I had passed: but, without vanity I may truthfully declare that my beauty was by no means impaired,—while the little excitement of preparation for going out gave a heightened colour to my cheeks.

When I returned to my sitting-room, I found that Mrs. Sherwood was in readiness, and waiting there with Mr. Alvanly. They were at the moment discussing the relative merits of two popular preachers, who they named; and while Mrs. Sherwood declared that she never could listen to a sermon of the Rev. Mr. Tyndale without tears, Mr. Alvanly as emphatically asserted that he never issued forth from Dr. Butler's church without feeling himself a wiser and a better man. We descended to the carriage which speedily bore us to the British Museum, in the immediate neighbourhood of Queen Square: thence we proceeded to St. Paul's Cathedral; and thence to Westminster Abbey. The dusk was setting in when we issued from this last-mentioned edifice: and as we were rolling along in the carriage, Mr. Sherwood said, with an appearance of much timid hesitation, "I do not know, Mr. Alvanly, whether you will think me impertinent—whether you will take it as a liberty—but if you would condescend to come and partake of such humble fare for dinner as my poor table can afford, I should feel highly honoured—And of course Miss

Lambert is included in the invitation."

"It will give me the greatest pleasure," responded Mr. Alvanly: "for the truth is, I have no company at home to-day—I have no other invitation for the evening; and therefore, if it were not for your thoughtful kindness, I should have to return and take a solitary dinner—which, I can assure you, is a most gloomy proceeding.

The carriage reached the house in Queen Square; and while Mr. Alvanly entered Mrs. Sherwood's sitting-room on the ground floor, I ascended to my own chamber to make such requisite change in my toilet as occasion seemed to deserve. I had passed several hours much more agreeably than I had anticipated when first setting out; and what with the little excitement thereof,—and with the assurance that I had received from Mr. Alvanly that a lady was now at length earnestly and seriously interesting herself in my behalf,—I was altogether in far better spirits than I had ever yet been since leaving home—I might almost say than I had been for many, many months past. I descended to Mrs. Sherwood's room: dinner was served up—and a very excellent repast it was, with wine sparkling on the board. Mr. Alvanly chatted in his usual gay manner; and though at times his conversation might be deemed light and frivolous, it was nevertheless so replete with good humour, and so courteously respectful, that it was impossible to cavil at it. The evening passed pleasantly and even gaily. At ten o'clock, a supper tray was brought up; and Mrs. Sherwood produced a bottle of Port wine, which she said belonged to a small remnant of the excellent cellar her poor dear husband had kept

in his life-time. As she thus spoke, she turned aside for a moment to apply her kerchief to her eyes; and I experienced a feeling bordering on veneration for the good widow who could thus bestow a tear to the memory of one whom I thought to myself, she must have loved very devotedly.

The wine was decanted; and Mr. Alvanly doing the honours of the supper-table at Mrs. Sherwood's request, filled three glasses. I had already taken a little wine at dinner and begged to be excused from touching any more: but Mrs. Sherwood appeared so hurt that I would not taste her late husband's favourite and choice sample, I was compelled to yield. I drank about half the contents of the glass: and scarcely had I set it down upon the table, when I experienced so strange a sensation of dizziness, that I felt as if I were about to faint.

"Good heavens, Miss Lambert!" cried Mrs. Sherwood, starting up from her chair with every appearance of excitement and alarm; "are you ill?"

I endeavoured to murmur a few words expressive of the sudden feeling of giddiness and faintness which had come over me; I had not the power—the sensation increased—and consciousness abandoned me.

When I awoke, I was in bed in my own chamber, where a light was burning. My ideas were still all in confusion; and my first sensation was that of a dull heaviness in the head:—but all in a moment I became aware that I was not alone: and suddenly galvanized, as it were, into fullest vitality, I glanced towards my companion—Oh, horror! it was Mr. Alvanly.

I pass over the anguish of feeling which now seized upon me: I will merely allude to the bitterness of the reproaches and the poignancy of the upbraidings which I levelled against him; nor is it necessary to do more than state that he endeavoured to console me with protestations of the deepest, tenderest, fondest love. In a word, I accepted my destiny: it appeared to me that I was doomed to become the victim of man's perfidiousness—that it was a fate against which it were vain to struggle; and I consented to become his mistress. How could I do otherwise? did I not now perceive that he had been deluding me with his promises of obtaining the interest of ladies on my behalf? and could I hope, dishonoured and polluted as I was, to obtain a situation in a respectable family? But Mrs. Sherwood—Ah! I now comprehended but too well how she had lent herself to the furtherance of Mr. Alvanly's design—how her respectability was a mere gloss—how her admiration of some fashionable preacher was the vilest of hypocricies—and how her tears for her late husband, if she ever had one at all, were but such as a crocodile might shed. That from the very first as my destruction had been contemplated, I could have no doubt; and though I now submitted to an imperious necessity and resigned myself to become the mistress of him whom I had considered a benefactor, yet experienced towards the treacherous Mrs. Sherwood a degree of rancour that rendered forgiveness impossible. I vowed that I would not remain beneath her roof a moment longer than the delay to be occasioned by procuring fresh apartments; and Alvanly, who

demonstrated every inclination to do my bidding in all things, and minister to any wish which I might form, assured me that I should remove to another and more sumptuous lodging that very day. Immediately after breakfast he took his departure for the purpose of making the needful arrangement; and when he was gone, Mrs. Sherwood made her appearance. She entered the room with her countenance composed down into a very contrite expression; but I indignantly ordered her from my presence, and positively refused to listen to any word of apology.

"Oh! well then, young Miss," she exclaimed, suddenly flinging off the mask and revealing herself in her true colours, "you may hold up your head as high as you like, and be as proud as you choose: but I don't care a fig for you. It's all stuff and nonsense! Just as if you didn't know how it must all end sooner or later! Living here on a fine gentleman's purse and receiving his visits, which on every occasion grew longer and longer! I'll be bound you are as artful a puss as any I ever set eyes on!"

I flew at the woman in a paroxysm of rage; and she hurried in affright from the apartment,—the door of which I closed and locked after her. I then sat down, and burst into a flood of tears. She had spoken one truth, which, though couched in coarse terms, had nevertheless gone home to my very heart. Indeed, how *could* matter have had any other end than that which they had reached? and was I not blind in failing to perceive that such would be the case? Ah! but I was so inexperienced in the ways of the world—I had clung to the idea that there was such a sentiment as a

generous and disinterested friendship—I had given Mr. Alvanly credit for the most magnanimous feelings—and thus, in my too great confidence, had I been ensnared. But all of a sudden I wiped away the tears from my eyes: and murmuring to myself, "It is my destiny!" resolved to accept it with a kind of desperate recklessness wherein remorse itself might be absorbed.

In a couple of hours Gustavus—for that was Mr. Alvanly's Christian name—returned to the lodgings and embracing me with every demonstration of affection, said that he had taken a suite of apartments which he felt assured I should like, and that he had come to remove me thither. His carriage was at the door; my clothes were already packed up; and I descended with him to the equipage,—Mrs. Sherwood not making her appearance to see us off. The carriage proceeded to Jermyn Street, where it stopped in front of a respectable-looking House, at which we alighted. The front-door was opened by a servant-girl of neat appearance; and then the landlady came forth to receive us. She was fine, handsome, gaily dressed woman, of about forty—with a shape developed into a rich *embonpoint*—and the slightest tint of rouge upon her cheeks. She had a very good set of teeth, and smile most graciously in order to display them but her manner was perfectly respectful and even lady-like. I found that Mr. Alvanly had engaged for my accommodation the entire house with the exception of the ground-floor rooms, which were occupied by the landlady, whose name I should observe was Mrs. Harborough, and who passed as a widow. The house was most sumptuously furnished. I was

conducted through all the apartments which were now mine, and found that there were drawing and dining rooms—breakfast-parlour and boudoir—bed-chambers and dressing rooms—a bath-room likewise,—and all appointed in the handsomest manner. I was moreover given to understand that a kitchen separate from that belonging to the landlady was at the service of my own domestics;—at which intimation Mr. Alvanly whispered in my ear, that through the good offices of the landlady, a cook, housemaid, and lady's maid, would be procured for me in the course of that day or the next. When I had inspected the apartments,—and I must confess that I was both gratified and flattered by the arrangements thus made for my comfort.—Gustavus begged me to accompany him for a ride in the carriage; and he took me to a mercer's establishment, where he insisted upon my choosing several costly dresses, shawls and other articles of raiment, fitted only for a lady of wealth and station. Thence we proceeded to a jeweller's shop, where he purchased me a gold watch and chain, ear-rings and necklace, finger-rings, and other articles for all of which he paid without the slightest attempt to beat down the tradesman in his prices. As we continued on our ride, he stopped at a wine merchant's and gave some orders: thence we proceeded to other shops, where he made fresh purchases of such things in the shape of luxuries and elegances which he fancied I might like. Thus were three hours passed away; and on our return to the lodgings, I found that a large stock of wine—including a champagne and hock, and other choicest specimen of the French and

German vintages—had arrived; the table was laid for dinner, and sumptuous repasts was served up. Mr. Alvanly compelled me to drink two or three glasses of champagne; and I felt so exhilarated that all remnants of remorse were, for the time being, banished from my bosom; I laughed and chatted gaily; and I must add that without any considerable degree of coyness I retired to rest with him when the hour arrived.

On the following day my dresses were given out to a fashionable milliner to be made up; and the servants whom Mrs. Harborough had hired for me, came to enter upon their situations. They were of very respectable appearance; and I must especially notice Frances, the young woman who was to serve as my own maid. She was about three-and-twenty—tall and well formed—with a handsome countenance—a modest look—and respectful manners. I could not help blushing with a sense of shame as she introduced herself to me for the first time: for I thought that if she were indeed a virtuous young woman, as she had the appearance of being, it was somewhat too hard as well as inconsistent that honest industry should thus have to wait upon sinful indolence. Indeed, several days elapsed ere I could so habituate myself to her attentions as to receive them otherwise than as a favour conferred upon me: but that sense of mingled bashfulness and shame on my part soon wore off, and I lost a diffidence which was one of the remnants of my better feelings. My new dresses soon came home from the milliner's and at Mr. Alvanly's special desire. I eschewed "those odious cotton-gowns" which I had purchased at Mrs. Sherwood's; so that while they were given to my own

maid, I arrayed myself in silks and satins.

Mr. Alvanly generally came to see me every day at about two o'clock; and if it were fine, he took me for an airing in his carriage or his cabriolet—but generally the latter. He dined with me three or four times a week; and those occasions remained till the following morning, when he took temporary leave after breakfast. He was most liberal in supplying me with funds; and when I hesitated at certain expense, laughed and bade me not fear that I should ruin him, as he possessed four thousand a year—was a single man—and could therefore very well afford to minister all my wants and pleasures. Sometimes on an evening he took me to the theatre, to concerts, or to other places of amusement; on which occasions I was introduced to some of his male acquaintances, who for the most part were young noblemen or gentlemen of property.

And now it may be asked whether I loved Mr. Alvanly? Assuredly I did not. At first there was a lingering sense of resentment in my mind against him for what I could not regard otherwise than as the insidious treachery by which he had ensnared me; but when I found that he did all he could to contribute to my happiness—that he surrounded me with all the luxuries and the elegances of life—that he never considered any expense too great if the object to be procured would afford me gratification—and when, too, I discovered that his treatment of me was uniformly kind and even affectionate—that recentful feeling wore off, and I learnt to like him though I could not love him. But there is another question which my reader would doubtless be in-

clined to put: whether I often thought of home and those I had behind me there? Yes I did; and when alone in my drawing-room, or in the solitude of my chamber, I frequently wept bitterly, as the images of my father, my mother, and my brother would rise up before me. I longed to communicate with them—to ascertain whether they had profited by the purchase-money of my virtue—or whether gold so procured had proved a fatal gift in their hands. But I dared not write to them. Not for world's would I stand the chance of having either of them come to seek me out, and behold me revelling in the luxury of my shame. But after the expiration of some weeks, I mentioned to Gustavus that it would be a source of infinite relief to myself if by some indirect means I could obtain information relative to those who were still so dear to me. He then informed me that he had a very intimate friend living at a town about twenty miles beyond Riverdale; and that it was on his return from a visit to this friend that he had first encountered me, in the way already known to the reader. He volunteered to write to the gentleman alluded to, and get him to make such inquiries as I wished—but to conduct them with as much privacy and caution as possible. The letter was accordingly written; and during the few days which elapsed ere a reply came, I experienced a most painful degree of suspense. At length the answer arrived; and Gustavus placed it in my hands. From that communication I learnt that the parsonage at Hawthorn had been duly furnished that Mr. Lambert's debts had all been paid off—and that though the persons in the neighbourhood wondered somewhat whence he had procured

his resources to accomplish all this, there were certain suspicious whispers to the effect that it was in some way connected with the sudden and mysterious disappearance of his daughter. I furthermore learnt that my mother had been very ill, but that she was past danger and, getting better at the time the inquiries were made. As for my brother—he had left the village very soon after my flight thence; and it was supposed that he had gone to some neighbouring town to procure a situation. Such was the intelligence that I received and while I wept over the letter which conveyed it. I nevertheless experienced a feeling of relief at having obtained those tidings. But I dreaded lest Cyril should think of coming up to London—or perhaps be already resident in the metropolis—in which case I should constantly incur the risk of meeting him. Therefore, for several days after the receipt of that letter, I was filled with affliction every time I went out, and experienced as much nervous apprehension on glancing along the crowd of passengers in the well-thronged streets of the West End, as did Robinson Crusoe when flinging his searching glances amidst the trees and bushes of his island after having seen the print of a man's foot upon the sand of the sea-shore. By degrees, however, this tremor wore off; and as I encountered not my brother, I reasoned myself into the belief that he had not found his way to the great metropolis.

The month of February came—the session of Parliament commenced—and now Mr. Alvanly was less frequently with me than hitherto. I was left more to myself; and the time often hung very heavy upon my hands. I practised on the piano and the

guitar—I read novels—I did a little embroidery work: but still I could not occupy my hours so fully as to escape from a sense of loneliness. I had no visitors: Mr. Alvanly's male acquaintances, to whom I had been introduced, never called upon me: the only person whom I occasionally received in my drawing-room, was Mrs. Harborough; and there was something about her that I did not particularly like. She spoke of gentlemen with a certain degree of effrontery and with a familiarity which even brought up a blush to my cheeks: she talked of having been acquainted with three or four noblemen, whom she named—likewise of some of the officers in the Guards: so at length I began to suspect that she herself had been a gay woman in her time—and for aught I knew to the contrary, was so now. Dishonoured as I myself was—given up to a life of shame—and irreparably disgraced in my own eyes, I nevertheless still had an instinctive loathing at the depravity of others, and I felt humiliated and deeply mortified at being forced to receive such a woman even as an occasional associate: so that when I at length began to read her true character, I discouraged her visits to my rooms as much as possible.

One evening—when the house of Commons did not sit and Mr. Alvanly had been dining with me—he observed that he feared I must occasionally find myself rather lonely: and he expressed his regret that he was not able to devote more of his time to my society.

"Yes," I said—and I could not altogether suppress a sigh: "I do feel lonely at times: and though I endeavour to amuse myself as

much as possible, the hours often hang heavily upon my hand."

"My dear Rose," answered Gustavus, "you can have acquaintances if you like: but you are well aware of what description the female ones must be; and I have hitherto forborne from affording you the opportunities of making such friendships. To speak more plainly still, I should inform you that several of those gentlemen to whom you have been introduced have their mistresses all of whom I fear "are not quite so correct in their general conduct as yourself: but others there are with whom you might associate."

"Now tell me, Gustavus," I said "is not Mrs. Harborough a somewhat gay woman?"

"Ah! you have discovered that?" he said, with a smile. "Well, you have rightly conjectured. She was once a celebrated beauty—has lived under the protection of noblemen of the highest rank—but I fancied had become very steady now, as she is getting *passie*; and therefore I saw no harm in engaging these rooms at her house. But to return to what I was saying, you shall have acquaintances. You *must* have them;—it is impossible I can leave you in this lonely position. Come, dearest! a glass of champagne will cheer your spirits."

We were sitting at dessert when this conversation took place. The reader may picture to himself a handsomely furnished room, flooded with light—myself seated, in an elegant evening dress, upon a sofa—my chestnut-brown hair flowing in all its luxuriance upon my bare shoulders—my neck and arms glittering with jewellery—a champagne-glass in one hand, a posy of early violets in the other. And yet, though surrounded by all imaginable luxuries, and with-

out a care in a pecuniary sense, I was nevertheless pensive even to mournfulness. There was a certain aching at my heart as I reflected that the very indolence of my life was a dull monotony, which not even succulent repasts and sparkling wines could effectively vary; even when Gustavus filled that glass again and bade me cheer up, it was only with a sickly smile that I responded to his attentions: and he somewhat excited by the wine he was drinking, held up his own glass, exclaiming in his blithest tones, "Despond not, dearest Rose! I know what will make you happy: you want society—and you shall have it."

"But let it be of the best that, under circumstances I can possibly hope to enjoy:"—and as I thus spoke, the blood mantled upon my cheeks; for I thought how, by my position, I was cut off from that society which, had I remained virtuous, I was entitled to take my place amongst.

"You shall have noblemen at your table," responded Gustavus; "and of the ladies under their protection, you shall have those with whom you can best associate. This is Tuesday: on Friday evening have a banquet prepared for a dozen guests; spare no expense—order every luxury to be procured: I will myself send somewhat to contribute to the rarities which shall appear upon the board: and leave the invitations to me. Is it agreed?"

"It is," I answered, after a little hesitation: for while on the one hand I still shrank from forming the intimacy of woman in an equivocal position, notwithstanding that my own was such,—yet on the other hand, I felt the want of society; and I had not the moral courage to sacrifice this

craving to any sense of better feelings.

On the following morning, as I was reading the newspaper after breakfast,—Mr. Alvanly having just taken his departure,—I started as my eyes settled suddenly on a name which was but too fatally familiar to my knowledge. It was in a short paragraph amongst the fashionable intelligence, and ran as follows:—

“APPROACHING MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE—We understand that Horatio Rockingham, Esq., only son and heir of the wealthy proprietor of the Hawthorn estates in Cheshire, will shortly lead to the hymeneal altar Lady Lucia Calthrope, only daughter of the venerable Earl of Eveleigh. Her ladyship, who is beautiful and highly accomplished, has recently been staying with her noble parents at a friend's mansion in the neighbourhood of Riverdale; and we believe that it was during this sojourn in Cheshire the attachment was formed which is now to have its legitimate and happy result.”

The reading of this paragraph, couched in the usual fulsome language with which the chit-chat of fashionable intelligence is wont to be conveyed, conjured up mournful thoughts in my mind. All the incidents of the past were by that fatal name of Horatio Rockingham brought vividly back to my memory; and I fell into so desponding a train of meditation, that in order to shake it off, I threw down the newspaper—sped to my dressing-room—and, with the assistance of Frances commenced the avocations of the toilet. Mr. Alvanly was not to visit me again that day,—he being on a Committee of the house of Commons, and

unable to neglect the special business on which he was thus engaged. Moreover, an exciting debate was expected to commence in the House at five o'clock, with every probability of being prolonged till a late hour. He had therefore given me to understand that I was not likely to see him until the next day; but, as usual, he placed his carriage at my disposal; and I gladly availed myself of it, in the hope that the excitement of shopping, on which I purposed to employ myself, would cheer my spirits. It was about two o'clock when I thus went forth; and having visited my milliner, and a mercery establishment in Regent Street, I proceeded to a jeweller's in Bond Street, where I had a purchase to make. While I was there engaged, a very handsome cabriolet stopped just behind my own equipage; and the next moment the gentleman who had alighted entered the jeweller's shop. Who should he be but Horace Rockingham! He started on beholding me—and then for a few instants surveyed me with surprise and admiration evidently blended in his looks: for I was dressed with the utmost elegance so far as carriage-costume went: and without vanity I may add that I never perhaps was more beautiful than at this period of my life. I also had started: and I felt the colour rush to my cheeks, then instantaneously fade away again: but fortunately the jeweller's assistant who was serving me, was occupied at the moment in taking something out of the shop-window; and therefore he did not observe the emotions which both experienced as we thus suddenly found ourselves face to face. My first impulse, on recovering my self-possession, was to turn coldly aside; and I was

even bitterly vexed that I should for a moment have betrayed any agitation of feeling : but a sudden thought flashed to my mind—and in consequence thereof my determination how to act was settled.

"Have I indeed the pleasure," said Horace, with the calmest effrontery, of beholding Miss Lambert once more?"—and he proffered his hand.

"Yes, Mr. Rockingham," I answered, as I took that hand: and I composed my features into an expression of amiability.

"I am quite charmed at this encounter!" he resumed: and his eyes devoured me with their gloating regards. "Have you been long in London?"

"Some time," I responded. "And you, Mr. Rockingham?"

"I only arrived a few days back," he rejoined. "But might I be bold enough to solicit the pleasure of calling upon you?"

I did not immediately answer the question—but desired the shopman to show me another article from the window; and when his back was again turned, I said in a hurried whisper. "Give me your address: I will write to you.

Horace's countenance brightened up: but he had not time to whisper the response, ere the shopman turned to me again with the article I had asked for.

"I wish," said Horace, addressing himself to the assistant, "that you would presently send over some gold chains for me to look at: I have not time to inspect them now. I am staying at the Clarendon Hotel;"—and as he thus spoke, he glanced significantly at me; so that I fully understood he had taken this device in order to make me acquainted with his address.

My own purchase were now completed; and Horace politely

handed me forth to the carriage, pressing my hand and looking lovingly on me as he did, so: while I bowed to him, at parting, with as much affability as if I had totally forgotten his diabolical conduct towards me. I returned home, and sat down to meditate upon the course which I had now to adopt in pursuance of a certain plan which had struck me on first encountering my detested seducer at the jeweller's shop. It was too late to execute it on this particular day: but I resolved to find an opportunity of putting it in train on the following one. I slept little that night—but lay thinking for several hours on the subject to which I have alluded.

Next morning I rose somewhat earlier than usual—notwithstanding the bad night I had passed—and dressed myself to go out. Immediately after breakfast I sent for a cab, and ordered the driver to take me to my milliner's—naming the establishment—in Regent Street. But I had really no business there: and only gave the instruction to prevent my maid, who attended me down to the vehicle, from thinking it singular that I should go out thus early. Therefore, when the cab stopped in front of the milliner's, I said that I had altered my mind—and directed the man to drive to Eveleigh House in Portman Square: for I had learnt the address from the Court Guide on the preceding evening. On reaching the Earl's mansion, I inquired if his lordship were at home; and the powdered lace-bedizened lacquey who came down the steps to speak to me in the cab, replied in the affirmative—but that he did not know if his lordship would receive any one at that hour. He asked what name he should take

in. I said that it was useless to give any, as the Earl was unacquainted with me: but I desired the footman to present to his lordship a brief note, which I had penned in anticipation of some such demur as this which I was experiencing. The note was merely to the effect that the writer was anxious to give the Earl of Eveleigh some information on an important subject, which it was most desirable for him to receive. The billet produced its effect; and in a few minutes the footman came forth to request that I would walk in. Alighting from the vehicle, I was conducted into a handsomely furnished parlour—where I was almost immediately joined by the Earl of Eveleigh. He was a man bordering upon seventy, but carried his years well; and though his hair was thin and white, his eyes had not altogether lost their pristine fire—nor his form, though slightly bowed, its aristocratic carriage. His manners were cold and reserved—I might even say haughtily severe as well as distant; and my first impression of his character was that the epithet of “venerable” which the lickspittle newspaper had given him, was as misplaced as the term “gallant” often is when applied to an officer—that of “honourable” to a member of Parliament—and that of “reverend” to a clergyman. However, I had my own part to perform—I knew full well that the proud Earl would soon become interested in what I was about to say—and though somewhat agitated, I was by no means over-awed by his cold and distant manner.

“May I request to be informed,” he said, “of the meaning of this somewhat singular and mysterious note which I hold in my hand? It

gives no name: and therefore I scarcely know whether I ought to have bestowed any attention upon it.”

“Not being exactly aware into whose hands it might fall, my lord,—or to whom you might exhibit it ere acting upon its contents—I deemed it better to make it as concise and as little explicit as possible.”

He gazed stedfastly and scrutinizingly upon me as I made him this answer; and by the time I had finished speaking, I felt that all my self-possession had completely returned.

“Well,” he said, coldly, indicating a chair—for I was standing when he entered, and he also had remained standing until this moment,—a proceeding which was rude enough, as I flatter myself that I certainly looked like a lady, and he as yet knew nothing to my prejudice,—“you have obtained, madam, the interview which you sought; and I beg that you will at once proceed with the business which has brought you hither.”

“Without farther preface I will do so,” I immediately replied. “A paragraph in the newspaper informs me that your lordship’s daughter, Lady Lucia Calthrope, is engaged to be married to Mr. Horatio Rockingham.”

“Yes!”—and now the Earl’s countenance did indeed express all the interest which I had felt assured I should be enabled to excite: but subduing any farther betrayal of that sensation, he observed, coldly, “May I request to be informed how that circumstance is connected with your visit?”

My lord,” I answered—and I felt that there was a bitter emphasis in my words as I spoke,—“your daughter is engaged to a man—no, not a man!—a fiend boy

whose soul is of the blackest dye!"

These are strong expressions," said the Earl, visibly agitated "and you must explain them."

"Your lordship sees before you," I rejoined, with a crimson glow upon my countenance, "the victim of that vile wretch's diabolic perfidy."

"Young woman" answered Lord Eveleigh, slowly rising from the seat which he had taken and, looking upon me in a sort of stern abhorrence, with which not the slightest feeling of pity was blended,—"it is perhaps but natural that you should thus express a very strong feeling: but the youthful errors of an individual do not incapacitate him from aspiring to an honourable marriage. I believe there are few men who can look back upon their earlier years, without beholding something which they are compelled to think of with regret and remorse."

"But mine, my lord, is no ordinary case!" I said, growing very much excited. "It is a case of the most devilish infamy on the part of him who seeks your daughter's hand! Listen, my lord—"

"But if I hear you," interrupted the Earl, "how do I know but that your tale may be highly-coloured? It is natural that it should be so. You feel yourself aggrieved—and you are evidently impelled by a vindictive spirit."

"It is not altogether vengeance, my lord," I said, "which now inspires me: though I will not deny that it enters largely into my motives for coming hither. But dishonoured though I myself am, I would fain rescue a young lady—who perhaps is amiable and confiding—from the misery which must await her if she link her

destiny with one whose soul is capable of the most fiendish actions. Do not think, my lord, that because I have fallen, I am lost altogether to every good feeling. As a proof that I am actuated by delicate considerations in the mode of seeking this interview, I will remind your lordship that I might have sought the presence of the Countess of Eveleigh—or even that of Lady Lucia Calthorpe herself: but I did not choose to wound their sensibilities by parading my shame before them. Therefore I decided on giving my explanations to your lordship."

He had listened with an evidently deepening interest, as well as with a growing uneasiness, to this long speech which I made; and when I had finished, he reflected for some moments. At length he said, with the air of a man who endeavours to put disagreeable ideas as far away from himself as possible,—"Every victim of treachery considers her own special case to be the blackest and the worst. I am sorry for you—I am sorry too that I should have heard anything in the least disparaging to Mr. Rockingham: but I must again tell you, I do not consider you have said aught that should weigh with me to the extent which you seem to anticipate. Give me your name and address: you have evidently certain feelings of delicacy; and I hope that if such pecuniary amends as *can* be made, are afforded you, the peace of my daughter will never be disturbed by the knowledge of any little errors which her intended husband may have fallen into."

"My lord," I exclaimed, colouring with indignation, "have I the appearance of one who comes to extort money?"—and I glanced

down at my dress of good materials, and at the jewellery which I wore.

"I did not mean to insult you, young woman," was the Earl's answer coldly and haughtily given "and you should have taken my words as kindly meant. But since you choose to regard them in another light, I beg that our interview may end."

"My lord," I answered, rising from my seat, "you will bitterly repent the course which you are adopting now: for you leave me no alternative but to address to the Countess of Eveleigh a full and complete narrative of the tremendous wrongs I have endured at the hands of Horace Rockingham."

"No, no—you must not do this!" cried the Earl, evidently much alarmed; and as I moved towards the door, he held me back. "Tell me everything—Perhaps, I was wrong not to hear you—"

"But your lordship has given me to understand," I rejoined, "that you already prejudice me to the extent as to have the conviction that my narrative will be highly coloured. Now, a thought has struck me! There is a plan by which the entire truth of my history, in all its saddest and darkest details, may be brought to your conviction."

"And that plan?" said the Earl Eveleigh interrogatively.

"It is a plan," I answered, "which will not only convince your lordship that I have in no wise exaggerated Horatio Rockingham's guilt towards me—but which will also prove to you that even while engaged to your daughter, and soon to lead her to the altar, he is still a profligate."

"But your plan?" ejaculated the Earl. "You forget that you have not described it."

"It is simple enough," my lord. Come you to my residence this afternoon—

"I!" exclaimed Lord Eveleigh, seeming to be utterly shocked and horrified at the invitation.

"Then send your son—your solicitor—or any friend," said I calmly, and somewhat haughtily: "but I insist that this course shall be taken, as the only condition on which I will abstain from direct communication with your wife or your daughter. I will undertake to conceal whomsoever shall thus come to my residence. I will undertake likewise that Horatio Rockingham shall be there; and from his own lips shall your lordship, or whoever is delegated by you, hear the full avowal of the details of his treachery towards me."

The Earl reflected for a few moments—and then said, "No, not my son! It were madness, if things came to the worst, to provoke a duel between him and Mr. Rockingham. As for my solicitor—No, I will come myself. Where? and at what hour?"

I named my address, and specified three o'clock in the afternoon of that very same day: having done which, I took my departure.

CHAPTER VI.

REVENGE.—THE BANQUET.

RETURNING straight home to Jermyn Street, I immediately sat down and wrote two notes. One was to Horace Rockingham, penned in a very friendly manner, and inviting him to call upon me at half-past three in the afternoon. I likewise enjoined him to be punctual, as we should not have more than an hour to be together—thereby giving him to under-

stand that I ran some little risk in receiving him at all, and thus piquing his curiosity to ascertain more than he could have judged at the jeweller's, of the circumstances in which I was placed. The other note was to Mr. Alvanly, begging him not to come to me until five o'clock, when I would explain the reasons which had induced me to ask this favour,—but assuring him, in a good-humoured style, that I was doing nothing to provoke his jealousy. These two notes I at once despatched to their respective addresses—one to the Clarendon Hotel, the other to May Fair; and then I sat down to reflect, with feelings of vindictive satisfaction upon the plot which I had thus initiated for the punishment of my pitiless seducer.

Shortly after two o'clock I repaired to my dressing-room,—where, assisted by Fances, I appressed myself in the most elegant manner, and in a way to set off my charms to their greatest advantage. I wore a low-bodied dress, so as display the whiteness and plumpness of my shoulders and the beauty of my bust. My hair showered in a thousand glossy ringlets upon those shoulders; and I put on just sufficient jewellery for tasteful embellishment, but with a careful avoidance of meretricious effect. I experienced a strange malignant pleasure thus making the most of the loveliness with which I was endowed: I knew full well that in the boyish frame of Horatio Rockingham the fiercest volcanic passions agitated, raged, and boiled: and I was determined to tempt him to the utmost. But ere descending to the drawing-room, I threw a scarf over my shoulders, and fastened it with a beautiful cameo upon my bosom; because I had to receive Lord Eveleigh first

of all, and did not wish to play off the artillery of my charms upon him. Neither did I choose him to form of me a worse opinion than that which, as a matter of course I knew he already entertained.

Precisely at three o'clock his lordship arrived at the house, on foot; and he was at once shown up to the drawing-room, where I received him. He was evidently surprised to find me dwelling in such splendid apartments; and I am equally sure that he was struck by my appearance: for a woman can always tell when her attractions make an impression upon one of the male sex, however strenuous the latter may be to conceal the susceptibility. He was somewhat agitated; but as he contemplated me, was more polite than during our interview of the morning; and I knew that it was the effect of my beauty which thus to a certain degree thawed the frigid reserve of his manner towards me. I informed his lordship that in order to give him full time to be beforehand with Mr. Rockingham, I had appointed half-past three for the coming of the latter; and I now stipulated that whatever his lordship might hear pass between us, he would remain in strictest concealment until I should give some signal, which I would render unmistakably significant, for him to come forth. He pledged himself to follow my directions; and I then proceeded to ensconce him in his hiding-place. There was a back drawing-room, separated only by folding-doors from the front one; and it was quite easy for a person in one room to overhear, if he did but listen attentively, everything that took place in the other. It was in this back drawing-room that I concealed his lordship—

bidding him keep close to the folding doors so soon as he should hear Mr. Rockingham announced, I then resumed my seat upon the sofa; and now loosened the scarf which I had thrown over my shoulders. A glance in a full length mirror opposite, gave me every reason to be not merely satisfied with my personal appearance, but even vain of it. The excitement of the proceeding lent to my cheeks a rich carnation hue: the dress that I wore displayed to every advantage the symmetry of my shape; and if it had really been my intention to achieve a conquest, I need not have despaired of the issue.

St. James's church was chiming the half-hour, as a loud double knock resounded through the house; and in a few moments Mr. Rockingham was announced. He was dressed in the very height of fashion—but yet with the most admirable taste. As only about eight months had elapsed since the incidents of that memorable July evening on which occasion I so fully described him to the reader, no alteration had taken place in his personal appearance. He had still the girlish face, without the slightest evidence of nascent beard—the same boyish look—the same transparent beauty of the complexion—the same glossy silkiness of the light curling hair. But as he advanced towards me with outstretched hand, the colour rose to his cheeks, and the fires flashed from his eyes, as he fixed his devouring regards upon me. I rose from the sofa, and accepting his hand, assumed a demeanour of affable friendliness: but the colour deepened on my own cheeks, and I could not help casting down my eyes beneath the fierce ardour of

his look—though in my heart I experienced exultant feelings at the effect which my beauty produced upon him: for it filled me with confidence as to the issue of my vindictive scheme.

"This is very kind of you, Rose," he said; "and more than I expected. I did not think when I met you yesterday at the jeweller's, that you would really write to me: but as you have done so, I take it as a proof that you no longer cherish any resentment towards me. Therefore we are friends once again."

"It is useless to cherish resentment," I responded, "since the past cannot be recalled. Sit down and let us converse. I told you in my note that we should have but an hour or so——"

"Ah! then there is some happy man who has paramount claims upon your time—perhaps upon your love?" and Horace Rockingham spoke in all the melting softness of his melodious voice, as he placed himself by my side on the sofa.

"Love indeed!" I ejaculated: and the next moment I affected to laugh merrily.

"Then you do not love him—whichever he may be," Horace hastened to exclaim, "who has placed you in this brilliant position?"

"How can it possibly signify to you," I asked, "what may be the sentiment I entertain towards the gentleman under whose protection I am living? For that such is my position, you have rightly guessed; and it were utterly useless to deny it."

"What can it signify to me?" repeated Rockingham modulating his voice to a reproach. "Ought I not to consider that I have the first claim upon your love? I do

not wish to allude to unpleasant incidents of the past: but did you not give me some sort of an avowal that evening, you know—I think it was in July last——”

“Yes: because you yourself, Horace,” I interrupted him, “assured me that you loved me with all your heart and soul—that you worshipped me my image—that I was the idol of your affections!”

“And it was true, Rose!” he exclaimed, vehemently.

“Ah! but how fickle is man’s love,” I observed, now in my turn adopting a tone of reproach. “What am I to you at this moment?”

“Do you wish to be something?” he inquired, eagerly.

“I might—perhaps I might,” was my response, murmuringly given: but how can I be? Are you not about to lead a beauteous bride to the altar? I read the paragraph in the newspaper——”

“And were you sorry, Rose? tell me, were you sorry? Answer me, I conjure you!”—and he gazed upon me with the flushed cheeks and devouring eyes of intensely wrought passion.

“Yes—I was sorry,” I answered, bending down my looks, and pretending to become suddenly mournful. “I was sorry, without exactly knowing why: for I had no reason to love you after all your dreadful conduct towards me. But still I could not think without emotion of him who was the first that ever folded me in the embrace of love.

“Rose, you know not what joy you are exciting in my heart!” exclaimed Horace Rockingham. “You are ravishingly beautiful—far, far more beautiful than even you were on that evening when I drew your portraiture for your own contemplation, and when I fancied it was impossible to behold

a lovelier image. Yes, you are adorable!”—and he stretched out his arms towards me, to encircle me therewith.

“No—no!” I said: “not yet! not yet!”—but as I abruptly drew farther away from him on the sofa, I suffered the scarf to fall completely off my shoulders—thus giving to the circumstance the appearance of an accident totally unperceived by myself.

“Not yet!” he echoed: and then for a few moments he sat gazing upon me with the gloating looks of a passion indomitably sensuous. “Ah! I comprehend what you mean by those words, *not yet!* You wish to know on what terms we could henceforth be together. Now listen, Rose: for as you have testified so much generous forgiveness, I will treat you with an unreserved confidence. You saw by the newspaper that I am about to marry Lady Lucia Calthorpe. Well, it is so. But I will explain how. You know that my father rose from nothing, and that he made his fortune by all sorts of ways on which it may be rather inconvenient to look back. He is a rich man—but, after all, only a *parvenu*—a sort of upstart, who has no prescriptive right to pass the gilded portals of the fashionable world, and who therefore could only be tolerated within the brilliant saloons beyond that threshold. Such as the father is, so must the son be looked upon. Can you not therefore understand how, already possessing immense wealth, my father is naturally anxious to escape from a dubious and false position and obtain as it were a settled one—so that he may enter the lordliest mansion with head erect and not feeling as if the invitation thither were a boon and a favour for which

he ought to be grateful. The same sentiment animates myself. But how could our aims be accomplished otherwise than by the formation of an alliance with some old, time-honoured, aristocratic family? Now you understand wherefore it is that Lady Lucia has been wooed and won by me."

"And you do not love her, Horace?" I asked, having no longer any need to throw an assumed termulousness into my voice, in as much as it vibrated with a real satisfaction: for I felt that the successful issue of my vindictive scheme was unerringly certain.

"Love her!" ejaculated Horace, contemptuously as well as vehemently: "not I! She is beautiful—I do now deny it—but a cold marble image, with not even the adoration of a Pygmalion could warm into the fervour and glow of passion. Her father is one of those proud haughty aristocrats who deem it necessary to maintain a glacial reserve towards everybody who cannot boast of descent from the Norman conquerors or at least from the Barons in the time of the Tudors. His daughter Lady Lucia is a type of himself—though somewhat softened down by feminine attributes! Ah! I know that in their hearts they consider an immense honour is being conferred upon me, and that I ought to be vastly grateful! Were it not for the enormous wealth which my father can leave me at his death, I might have sighed, and pleaded, and poured forth love-vows for a thousand years in vain at the feet of Lady Lucia. No, Rose—I did *not* love her! But I love you—and I feel that I can adore you throughout my life!"

"But tell me, Horace," I said, seeming to be considerably agita-

ted; "would you so far forget your duties to a beauteous bride as to bestow any of your time on me?"

"I think, Rose," he answered, with fervour, "that I shall be only too glad to escape from the insipid platitudes and cold trivialities of Lady Lucia's conversation in order to pass whole hours in your more agreeable society. Say, then—"

"Stop!" I exclaimed: "I can give you no decisive response until we have had some further conversation. To deal candidly with you, Horace, I know not how to trust you. Pray do not interrupt me. My heart prompts me to one course: prudence urges me in a contrary direction."

"I swear to you, Rose," cried Rockingham, impetuously, "that you shall never have cause to repent of the fullest and completest reconciliation with me. My father, who will be in town in a few days, has pledged himself to settle an immediate income of twelve thousand a-year upon me. Think you that of this revenue I cannot spare a thousand or two for one whom I love!"

"But listen, I repeat, Horace, you need only to cast your eyes around, in order to satisfy yourself that I am under the protection of one who regards gold as dross when my slightest whims or caprices are concerned;—and that I have an entire hold of his affections, so that there is no cause to apprehend being ever abandoned by him, I have every reason to believe. Think you, therefore, that I will lightly resign this position in which he has placed me?"

"Rose, I swear to you," exclaimed the impassioned young man, "that there is nothing I may be enabled to do to give proofs of my sincerity, which shall be left un-

done. I will provide for you—I will give you a bond ensuring you a handsome revenue for life—”

“You cannot speak more fairly,” I interrupted him: “but pause. Horace—reflect upon the past. Can you wonder if I have mis-trusted you? can you be astonished if I consider your nature to be selfish? Again I say, do not interrupt me: for it is by the calm discussion of the past, that you can alone give me assurances for the future. Does not your conscience tell you that you dealt harshly by me? When you first made certain overtures, did I not reject them with indignation? was I not pure and virtuous—proud of my innocence—and embued with so much rectitude of principle that only the foulest treachery—no, not treachery, but a cold-blooded resolve to take advantage of the circumstances which threw me in your power,—that only *this*, I say, could have drawn me down from the pinnacle of honour?”

“Oh; why this recapitulation?” cried Rockingham. “The recollections of the past only sour the hopes of present and future bliss.”

“Do you not know, Horace,” I asked, “that a woman who has been offended—a woman who has been outraged—a woman who has been made a victim in spite of herself—must be propitiated: her pardon must be sought—there must be a solemn avowal of conscious guilt towards her, so as to constitute a starting-point for a new and better understanding. It is the nature of our sex to require such atonement as this: and if it be frankly given, we can pardon the past—and we can love again for the present and the future.”

“Oh! if this be all you require at my hands,” exclaimed Horace, “most readily do I confess my sins towards you! Here, upon my knees do I avow them!”—and he fell at my feet as he thus spoke “Yes—my conduct was bad towards you—”

“Say execrably wicked, Horace,” I observed.

“Yes—execrably wicked!” he exclaimed, quickly echoing my words: for he was hurried along by the strong current of his frenzied passion. “Forgive me, Rose—and be to me what I have asked; so that I may be to you all I have promised.”

“And what if I were to stipulate that you repeat everything you have spoken in the presence of a witness?”

“A witness?” he exclaimed, starting up to his feet, and surveying me with alarm. Wherefore? what mean you? Oh, have I not said and done enough? Let me embrace you, Rose,—dearest Rose! and with kisses let my forgiveness be sealed!”

“No, sir!” I ejaculated, firmly repulsing him as he was about to snatch me in his arms: then, as he fell back in mingled dismay and wonderment, I added, “But there is a witness—and he will now appear!”

At that instant the folding-doors were burst open; and the Earl of Eveleigh—white with rage, quivering all over and his wonted iciness of demeanour changed into the fury of a thousand contending passions—appeared before the astounded and horrified young man. Bitter, most bitter must have been the humiliation, the mortification, and ire of that old nobleman, to have heard himself and his daughter spoken of in the terms which Horace Rockingham had used;

and indeed the success of details beyond my most sanguine expectations: for I did not foresee that my detested seducer would have been led to speak so disparagingly of his intended bride and her father.

For a few moments Horace Rockingham remained riveted to the spot, utterly confounded: but as a full sense of his position evidently flashed to his mind, he flung upon me a glance of the most fiendlike malignity,—exclaimed, “By heaven, I will be bitterly revenged for this”

“Revenged?” I echoed, with a mocking laugh. “I despise you too much to fear you! What can you do to injure me, vile and execrable boy that you are? Revenge? it is I who have been revenged! But even here my vengeance shall not stop, if you dare to threaten me. Throughout your life will I watch you; and whenever you obtain admission into the bosom of a family, from which you may seek to bear away some too confiding girl as your bride,—will I proclaim the tale of my own wrongs, and then ask father, mother brothers, sisters, or friends, whether they will consent to bestow an innocent young damsel upon such a venomous reptile as thou art. Oh! it is the smallest and the most beautiful of snakes which are the most poisonous: and you are one of those reptiles!”

Having thus spoken, I turned away with a look of scorn and abhorrence—while Lord Eveleigh, advancing towards the discomfited young man, said to him, “Mr. Rockingham, I need not tell you that everything is at an end between my daughter and yourself. If you choose, sir, to leave it to me to form a fitting excuse for the breaking off of this contemplated alliance, do so: and neither my

own family nor the world at large shall become aware of the actual truth. Indeed, I claim this at your hands as the only atonement, poor though it be which you can make for your conduct, which has within the last hour been so completely unmasked. But if you think fit to assume an arrogant bravado, and go forth into society to boast of your misdeeds,—then assuredly will your life become a sacrifice to the just indignation of my son, Lord Calthorpe. How then, sir, it is to be?”

“Do as you like, my lord,” responded Horatio Rockingham, half-terrified at the menace thus flung out, and half endeavouring to assume that very air of bravado against which the Earl had warned him: then, the next moment, he abruptly quitted the room banging the door violently behind him.

“Now, my lord,” I said, turning towards the old nobleman, “did I deceive you when I spoke in such strong terms of the profligate character of Horatio Rockingham?”

“No, no—you did not deceive me!” said the Earl, sinking upon a chair like one exhausted.

I pitied him—and hastened to proffer a glass of wine, which he did not hesitate to accept. There was no icy haughtiness in his demeanour towards me now: he seemed to have forgotten the mingled disgust and abhorrence with which he had surveyed me in the morning when I proclaimed myself to be the victim of that fiend-boy. He was thoroughly humbled—deeply mortified—as well as profoundly afflicted; and again I say I pitied him.

“Miss Lambert,” he observed, when at length he rose to take his departure, “I know not how to express my gratitude for your

conduct in thus saving my daughter from becoming the wife of such a wretch. I fear that if I offered you anything you might be offended—”

“I require nothing, my lord—not even thanks,” I hesitated to interrupt him.

“But if you ever should need the assistance of a friend,” he rejoined “do not hesitate to apply to me.”

He shook me by the hand, and then bade me farewell. When he was gone, I sat down to enjoy the gratified feelings of revenge which I was now enabled to experience. There was an indescribable luxury in the thoughts which thus occupied my mind; and I could well understand that there was but little hyperbole in those earnest cravings for revenge on the part of injured individuals, which are so often depicted in the pages of the novelist. I was still meditating with a sort of gloating satisfaction on the scene which had taken place, when Mr. Alvanly was announced; and I lost not a moment in telling him everything that had occurred. He had at different times received from my lips partial revelations of the circumstances which had brought about my fall: but I was now completely explicit,—concealing not a single detail—no, not even my brother's great guilt. He listened with a sedate attention: and I saw that he fancied I had gone somewhat too far in the prosecution of my revenge. But still he did not give verbal expression to this opinion on his part; and I was too much elated with the success of my scheme to discuss it with him, now that it was over. Dinner was shortly announced; and when the champagne flowed freely, he forgot the serious impression

which my explanations had made upon him—while my own gaiety gave a cheerful impulse to his naturally good spirits; so that the evening was passed as agreeably as possible. On the following morning, ere Gustavus took his leave, I begged him to seek some opportunity of mentioning—as if accidentally, in the course of conversation with Mrs. Harborough, the landlady—that Lord Eveleigh and Mr. Rockingham had called upon me with his full concurrence: as I did not wish it to be suspected that I received visits unknown to my protector.

The Friday evening came on when the banquet was to take place; and in pursuance of Mr. Alvanly's instructions, I gave orders for a rich as well as elegant repast to be served up. Though it was only the commencement of March, yet green peas and strawberries were amongst the delicacies which were to make their appearance upon the board,—these being a present sent by Mr. Alvanly from Covent Garden Market. As the hour approached when the guests were to make their appearance; I apparelled myself in my best raiment; and when Gustavus came at six o'clock, he declared that he had never seen me look more beautiful. Shortly afterwards, those whom he had invited began to arrive. Two or three of the gentlemen accompanied the ladies who were living under their protection: but for the most part the male guests came separately, having merely appointed to meet their mistresses at the house. There were thirteen guests in all—seven gentlemen and six females. With the exception of one of the latter—who was somewhat coarse both in her appearance and her manners, these women were eminently

beautiful, and perfectly lady-like in their conduct: that is to say, they could be so if they chose, and were so through all the earlier part of the evening. They were sumptuously dressed; and two or three of them were decorated with brilliant diamonds of considerable value. Of the male guests, three were peers of the realm—another was a nobleman having a seat in the House of commons—a fifth was likewise a Member of Parliament and held a Government post—the sixth was an eminent barrister—and the seventh was a Captain in the Life Guards. The barrister was a middle aged man, with a large round and very red face, and whose Bardolphian nose indicated a considerable affection for the bottle. He was the protector of the female who has been specially noticed as being of coarse appearance and somewhat vulgar manners: but she had been a celebrated beauty in her time—and having a certain renown, maintained her footing in this particular sort of society. Some of the females were called by the same surname as that which belonged to their protectors: thus for instance, the lady of the barrister, whose name was Dilkinson, passed as Mrs. Dilkinson. But the mistresses of the noblemen bore their own proper names—or else those which they had chosen to assume.

I must observe that the Captain of the Guards was the only one who had no lady living under his protection. His name was Reginald Fortescue: he was an exceedingly handsome man—not more than five and twenty years of age—with dark hair, a glossy black moustache, and an imperial on the chin. He had that peculiar outline of features which is generally described as aristocratic,

because it gives an air of high-bred haughtiness to the entire countenance. His figure was slender and perfectly well formed: his manners were elegant, but with a certain degree of languid abandonment, which could not however be accurately denominated an affectation: his voice was very agreeable; and though his conversation was for the most part on the frivolous topics of the day, yet from a few occasional remarks it could be discerned that he by no means possessed an uncultivated intellect. He was one of those young men who, if self-emancipated from fashionable follies and dissipated pursuits, might render themselves very pleasant as well as useful and ornamental members of society. In respect to his personal appearance, I should add that he had fine large dark eyes; and when he smiled his moustached lip revealed a set of the most beautiful teeth. He was apparelled in plain clothes for the present occasion; and this raiment, methought, must be better suited for his figure than the uniform of the Life Guards, which only ought to be worn by tall powerful men, of considerable muscular development.

I felt exceedingly bashful and confused when first introduced to all these guests. I was embarrassed not merely on finding myself amongst so many persons who until that moment were total strangers to me—but likewise because, being the mistress of the place, it was my duty to do my best to entertain them. And there was another reason—which was that I experienced a certain sense of shame at finding myself reduced to the necessity of seeking such women for associates and friends. The effect of all these

sentiments was to produce a despondency of the spirits; and I took an opportunity to whisper to Gustavus that I never should have the courage to seat myself at the head of the table when the banquet was served up. I besought him to let me sit next to him; and he promised that such an arrangement should be made. Accordingly, when dinner was announced, and we proceeded to the dining-room,—Captain Fortescue giving his arm to me,—Mr. Alvanly said a few good-humoured words, to the effect that it was Liberty Hall—all restraint and formality were to be thrown off—and that the gentlemen should preside over the feast, so that they might be all the better enabled to pay due attention and homage to the fair sex. He therefore requested Sergeant Dilkinson, the barrister, to take his seat at the bottom of the table,—Mr. Alvanly placing himself at the top, with me on one side and Mrs. Dilkinson on the other. Captain Fortescue having escorted me to the dining-room took a chair next to me; and perceiving that I was timid, bashful and constrained, he did his best to amuse and divert me, as well as to make me feel myself at home in the society by which I was surrounded.

The table had a most splendid appearance: massive plate and cut glass glittered upon the board, where all the choicest dainties of the season—and some that were not in season—were served up. The room was flooded with lustre: the games and jewellery bedecking the females, added to the resplendence of the scene. In massive wine-coolers, bottles of champagne were reposing in ice; the sideboard groaned beneath the weight of the fruits, preserves,

and confectionery which were to be placed in their turn upon the table: two of Mr. Alvanly's own footmen had been ordered from May Fair to assist in waiting; and altogether it was a banquet such as the highest and best in the land might well have sat down to. But for whom was it served? Alas! frequently did a distressing, humiliating, and an almost agonizing reflection upon this subject sweep through my mind for I thought to myself that while virtuous industry was elsewhere pining in want, or faring hardly upon a sorry crust—vicious indolence was here surrounded by every luxury that could pamper the appetite or gratify the palate.

The champagne flowed freely; and as Captain Fortescue insisted upon frequently refilling my glass,—moreover, as I myself gladly imbibed the exhilarating liquid in order to drown my desponding and compunctious reflection,—I succeeded in acquiring a degree of gaiety under the influence of the artificial stimulant. The other females soon grew very talkative: the laughter increased—until at length it burst forth into almost continuous peals: and I was astonished at the quantities of wine which the guests of my own sex poured down their throats. When the dessert was placed upon the table, the glasses were filled still more frequently than before: the conversation gradually became more free—so that the witticisms, the repartees, and the anecdotes, and the allusions, were not always confined within the limits of the strictest propriety. As the revelry increased, the discourse became still less guarded; and on several occasions I felt my cheeks burning at the looseness of the jests which were glibly sent forth from the tongue, and which elicited the

merriest shouts of laughter. My neighbour, Captain Fortescue, doubtless perceived that I had more delicacy than the other females present; and as he was evidently striving to please me, he did not abandon himself to the same ribald revelry. But as the orgie deepened, and several of those present, not even excepting the females, began to show signs of ebriety,—Mr. Alvanly himself included,—the young officer ventured to whisper certain flatteries and significant compliments in my ear. I discouraged them as much as possible: for methought that some of them amounted almost to overtures; and when he perceived that this style of language was distasteful to me, he turned the discourse upon other topics. Then I found him agreeable enough; and my gaiety rose again.

The revelry continued until near midnight—when several of the guests, both male and female, were much the worse for what they had taken. The Member of Parliament who held the Government post was excessively inebriated: and Mrs. Dilkinson, who sat next to him, delivered herself of some very coarse jest, as she pointed towards him with one hand, and with the other held up her champagne glass, at the same time exulting at the idea of herself being enabled to drink more than the gentleman alluded to.

At length the party broke up,—the gentlemen all thanking me with great fervour for the hospitality they had received,—the females crowding round me, lavishing all kinds of caresses and endearments, declaring that they were rejoiced to have formed my acquaintance, and assuring me that they should take the earliest opportunities of returning my kindness. When Captain Fortescue

took his leave, he pressed my hand and cast upon me a look of tender meaning: but I withdrew that hand abruptly, and bowed with a coldness which must have given him to understand that he had nothing to hope. Though myself somewhat excited with champagne, I was not too much so to forget my duty towards Mr. Alvanly; and though dishonoured and degraded—though forced to mix in such society as that which I have been describing—I had not utterly lost a sense of self-respect. When the guests had taken their departure, Gustavus asked how I had enjoyed myself? I replied in a manner which I thought would please him: for I did not choose to appear ungrateful for his endeavour to contribute to my entertainment. Besides, he himself was too much overcome by liquor to listen rationally to whatsoever observations I might have made upon the subject. But on the following morning when we were seated at breakfast, I no longer hesitated to hint that I considered the conduct of the females to have been forward and indelicate when once the wine had begun to produce an effect upon them. He admitted that such was the case: and I could not help thinking that he had given this banquet, and had collected together that society, for the purpose of convincing me that I had better thenceforth trust more to my own resources for amusement and recreation, than to such associates as circumstances permitted me to obtain.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OPERA.

THREE months passed away from the date of the banquet; and nothing of any consequence

occurred during this interval. Nevertheless my mode of life was not altogether the same as it had been previously to that festival. The noblemen and gentlemen as well as their mistresses, who were present at the entertainment, frequently called upon me; and though at first I but little liked their visits, yet gradually that repugnance wore off—so that at last I rather welcomed them as a means of whiling away the time which would have otherwise hung heavily on my hands. I did not however accept any invitations to dinner-parties at the residences of the ladies with whom I had thus become acquainted: yet the excuses I made were invariably of a character to avoid giving offence, I found that some of those women lived in the most magnificent style, as I judged from their conversation and from the splendid equipages which they kept. They all resided in the most fashionable parts of the town—frequented places of amusement—and led on the best existence or luxurious indolence, without ever seeming to reflect how it was all to end.

One or two of the gentleman, when first calling upon me, ventured upon certain compliments and flatteries which in themselves amounted almost to overtures—but yet not of so glaring a nature that I could openly resent them. I however treated them in the same way as I had acted towards Captain Fortescue, and gave them to understand as plainly as I could, that though they found me in an equivocal position, they must not thence argue that I was thoroughly deprived. Captain Fortescue himself was the most frequent of my male visitors; and though on one or two occasions he attempted to renew that kind of discourse

and demeanour towards me which I had at the very outset received coldly and distantly, his manner for the most part was respectful and courteous. But I could not shut my eyes to the fact that I had made, though most unintentionally, a tender impression upon him; and I could have wished that his calls had been less frequent. I even went so far as to mention to Gustavus that I would much rather the Captian would pay me less attention; but Mr. Alvanly, embracing me affectionately, declared he knew that I was incapable of deceiving him—that he was not jealous—and that he thankfully regarded the observations I had made as an additional proof of that constancy whereof he was already assured.

I must now relate a little incident which occurred at the expiration of the three months that had elapsed since the banquet. One afternoon—it was now the close of May—Gustavus took me to a fashionable jeweller's shop in Regent Street, and bought me a very handsome set of diamonds, for which he gave upwards of four hundred pounds. While we were examining the gems, I suddenly observed an ill-looking man peering through the window of the shop, and evidently watching our proceedings. His countenance struck me as being so villanous, and the circumstances altogether smote me with so sudden an apprehension, that I started visibly; whereupon the fellow instantaneously disappeared. I mentioned the incident to Mr. Alvanly and the jeweller—both of whom had noticed that abrupt display of terror on my part: but they speedily reassured me by ascribing the man's conduct to mere idle curiosity. I thought no more of the occurrence at the time: the

diamonds were deposited in a very handsome casket, which was borne to the carriage. From the jeweller's shop we proceeded in the direction of Jerman Street: but when crossing Piccadilly, I suddenly noticed the individual whose presence at the shop window had so much frightened me. He was hurrying round a corner, accompanied by another man at the instant I thus a second time settled my eyes upon him; and it occurred to me that his comrade was as evil looking a person as himself. An ejaculation escaped my lips: and I pointed in the direction which they had taken—adding that I feared they had been watching the carriage to see whither it was going, and perhaps discover its destination. Again did Mr. Alvanly assure me that I need not be frightened: for even if the men entertained any iniquitous design, it was evident they had now altogether decamped on perceiving that their suspicious movements were observed by me. Still I felt a certain vague trouble in my mind—and could not help reflecting on the truth of the maxim that all sweets in this life are more or less mingled with bitters: for even the possession of costly gems was now accompanied with its anxiety and care. We returned to the lodgings: and gradually the disagreeable impression made upon me by the occurrence I have related wore off.

On the following day, while Mr. Alvanly was absent, Captain Fortescue paid me a visit. His countenance was somewhat flushed; and he informed me that he had been to a champagne breakfast, given by a nobleman of his acquaintance. He was more or less under the influence of the wine he had drunk—though very far from being what might be

termed actually tipsy. He rattled away with an unusual volubility—talked with a levity which, being distasteful, I received with coldness—and not observing, or else not choosing to observe, my glacial demeanour, he began to pay me some of those flattering compliments which had all the significance of overtures. I gave him, as pointedly as I could, to understand that this style of discourse was disagreeable; and just at that moment Mrs. Harborough, the landlady, entered the room to bring me a letter, the maid not being at the moment in the way. The letter was merely one from Mr. Alvanly to tell me that he purposed to take me to the opera in the evening, and begging me to be dressed ready by the time he came. Captain Fortescue, in a manner but little consistent with his wonted good taste, launched out into praises of Mrs. Harborough's handsome person, as soon as she had quitted the room: and methought he did this by way of avenging himself for the coldness with which I had received his own half-implied overtures. I listened in silence, and with a marked reserve: so that he suddenly started up and with evident ill-humour bade me good afternoon.

I issued from the drawing-room almost immediately upon his leaving it—and was ascending to my dressing chamber, when I heard voices talking in the passage below. As I at once recognised them to be the voices of the captain and Mrs. Harborough, I could not help pausing to listen: but all I caught was an invitation from the landlady for the Captain to step into her own parlour and take a little refreshment. He accepted it; for I heard that parlour-door close, the front one not being opened to

afford him egress. I could not fancy wherefore I should be suddenly smitten with a feeling of annoyance at the little incident which I have described. Was it that I entertained in the secret depths of my soul a certain sentiment in favour of Reginald Fortescue? Such was the question which I asked myself when ascending to my dressing-room; and while engaged in the occupations of the toilet, I could not possibly banish the circumstances from my mind. If I were jealous at what had occurred, it must be that I really had some little predilection for the handsome young guardsman. I would not however admit this much to myself: and yet the suspicion that it was the truth fluttered vaguely and indefinitely in my heart.

By the aid of Frances, I was apparelled in the most elegant manner: my hair was on this occasion arranged in bands instead of in flowing ringlets; and I wore the diamonds which Mr. Alvanly had purchased for me. When my toilet was completed, I descended to the drawing-room—where I found Gustavus waiting my presence: and he was in perfect raptures with my beauty. We hurried over the dinner; and at the proper time entered the carriage to proceed to the Opera.

The house was crowded with a brilliant assemblage: the scene was magnificent; and the flood of light was reflected in the costly gems worn by the female portion of the audience. Never before had I beheld such an assemblage of feminine charms. Whichever way the eyes turned, they settled upon some delightful specimen of loveliness; and methought that it was no wonder if the gentlemen's opera-glasses should frequently

take the circuit of the boxes within their range, instead of being altogether fixed upon the stage. I must not be accused of vanity if I observe that many of those glasses were directed towards me; and Mr. Alvanly appeared both proud and delighted at the attention thus bestowed upon me. In the course of the evening some of our male acquaintances came to our box and chatted with us for a while. One or two of them were very anxious that we should go and sup with them and their ladies after the entertainments were over: but I threw a glance at Mr. Alvanly to give him to understand that I would rather not accept the invitation; and it was accordingly declined.

It was at a moment when we were alone together in the box—and at rather a late hour in the evening—that Mr. Alvanly directed my attention to a very beautiful young female who was seated in the pit, and who was accompanied by a fashionably dressed gentleman. At the moment my eyes were thrown in that direction the young female was sitting in such a manner as to prevent me from obtaining a view of her companion's countenance: but while I was still regarding them she leant forward—and then, to my mingled astonishment and dismay, I at once recognised in her companion my own brother. Yes—it was Cyril who was seated by her side—Cyril elegantly dressed—with a gold chain festooning over his white waistcoat—and with every appearance of being in good circumstances. Amazement sealed my lips; or else under the influence of that sudden surprise an ejaculation would have burst forth. Gustavus was at the time looking in some other direction; and he did not therefore perceive

the emotion which agitated me. I was however about to tell him of the discovery which I had just made, when it struck me that it would be impolitic to do so. The sickening thought flashed to my mind that Cyril could not possibly be pursuing a correct and steady course: for how could he honestly or honourably be possessed of the means to dress like a fashionable gentleman, frequent the Opera, and perhaps keep a mistress?—for that in this light the young female stood towards him, I had little doubt. If therefore he were really doing wrong—living extravagantly, plunging recklessly into debt, or perhaps even worse—it would not be wise of me to point him out to Mr. Alvanly as my brother—inasmuch as by his conduct he might disgrace me even more deeply than I was already disgraced by my own. If there were an exposure my protector might become ashamed of his connexion with me; and the results would be most disastrous to myself. Such were the hurried calculations which swept through my mind, and strengthened that seal which amazement in the first instance had placed upon my lips. I sat back in the box, so as to avoid being seen by Cyril if he had not already observed me; and when Mr. Alvanly asked if anything were the matter, I pleaded headache arising from the heat of the house. He proposed that we should take our departure; and I gladly, thankfully gave my assent. He went forth to see if the carriage were already in attendance, it being somewhat earlier than it was ordered to come. I was now alone in the box—and was plunged in painful reflection as to what course Cyril could be possibly pursuing—I

was also hesitating within myself whether I should not let him see me make some sign for him to come up and speak to me—when the door of the box abruptly opened: but instead of Mr. Alvanly reappearing, Horace Rockingham presented himself before me. His countenance wore an expression of fiendish vindictiveness and sardonic malignity, as he bent his eyes upon me—those eyes which flashed forth that sinister fire which at times indicated the fierce working of his evil passions.

"Look, Rose!" he said, in a low rapid whisper, as he pointed towards that part of the pit where I had seen my brother with the young female: "through him will I be bitterly avenged upon you!"

"Vile boy!" I ejaculated, but in an undertone: "What mean you? Did I not dearly—Oh! far too dearly, purchase his safety by the sale of my virtue?"

"Yes: but it is in other ways that I am working out my revenge" he immediately answered: "and perhaps it will include yourself likewise!"

With these words, uttered with all the diabolic fierceness of concentrated passion, he quitted the box as abruptly as he had entered it. I had started up from my seat when he made his appearance: I now sank back in my chair like one annihilated. What could he mean?—what toils was he weaving around my unfortunate brother? If he had explained himself, I should at least know the worst: but there was something horrible in the state of uncertainty in which he left me. Indeed, I was scarcely enabled to recover any degree of composure by the time Gustavus returned to the box; and then, on perceiving how deadly pale I looked, he

expressed his fears that I was more indisposed than I had chosen to admit. The carriage was in readiness: and he hastened to escort me from the theatre.

We descended the stairs—we passed the crush-room, now comparatively empty—and we issued forth into the colonnade. Just at that moment a tall, stout, flauntingly dressed female, with painted cheeks and a brazen look—and who was evidently somewhat under the influence of strong liquor—posted herself right in front of me; and with a terrible imprecation, accompanied by a coarse laugh, exclaimed, “Well, anybody can see what you are! You are no wife, modest as you pretended to look; and one of these days you will be trampling the pavement as I am now!”

I recoiled with indescribable horror from the presence of that disgusting woman: the very air seemed to be rendered pestilential by her breath: I shrank back with a loathing as strong as if it were from the contact of a mendicant wrapped in rotting rags;—and the dreadful words she uttered overwhelmed me with shame and confusion. They struck me, too, with the frightful force of a prophecy; and if Gustavus had not caught me in his arms, I should have sunk down upon the pavement. Several other unfortunate females,—as gaudily dressed and as highly painted as herself, and who were grouped together at a little distance,—burst forth into mocking, jeering laughter; and as I swept my affrighted looks around, I beheld Horatio Rockingham disappearing behind a pillar at a little distance. But I caught the expression of his vanishing countenance as the glare of the lamp-light shone upon it ere the column hid from my view;

and as there was a horrible keenness in my vision at the moment, I saw enough of that countenance to show me that its natural beauty was distorted by an expression of devilish malignity. Mr. Alvanly bore me half-fainting into the carriage, which at once drove away; and on reaching Jermyn Street, I immediately went to bed—ill, feverish, and mentally wretched. Gustavus was most anxious to send for medical assistance; but I assured him that I required none, and should be better in the morning.

I passed a miserable, sleepless night,—my mind haunted with all kinds of horrors: for I had received more than one proof that Horace Rockingham was busying himself with purposes of an implacable vengeance, alike against my brother and myself. That he had set that impudent woman to insult me in the presence of all the persons assembled at the time at the Opera-door and in the Colonnade, I could not doubt. I had been brought to shame in the eyes of the very lacqueys attached to the carriages in waiting; and the loose women of the payment had levelled their jeering laughter at me. But, Oh! that prophecy—it was *this* which had stricken the cruellest blow: for it seemed fraught—though proclaimed by the tongue of ribald levity—with the awful horror of stupendous truth. No wonder that I passed a restless night, and that I rose in the morning sick in body and sick at heart.

As I did not however choose to give Mr. Alvanly any explanations in respect to the conduct of Horace Rockingham, for fear that he should tell me that I had brought it all upon myself by the vengeance I had wreaked upon him in respect to Lady Lucia

Calthorpe,—I endeavoured to persuade him that I was much better than I really was: and under this impression he left me soon after breakfast. Then, on finding myself alone, I reflected that had done wrong not to take some measure on the previous night to communicate with Cyril. If I had done so, I might at least warn my brother against the machinations, whatsoever they were, of the vindictive Horace Rockingham. But while I was thus meditating, a loud knock resounded through the house; and in a few minutes the maid came up handing me a card, with the intimation that the gentleman whose name it bore requested to see me. That name was *Mr. Cyril Lambert*. For a few moments I was overwhelmed with so many and such conflicting emotions, that I was unable to give utterance to a single word; and when I raised my eyes, I saw that the maid was contemplating me with an earnest attention. She no doubt, from the identity of names suspected that the visitor was my brother; and perhaps fancied that I trembled lest he came to reproach me. Recovering from my confusion, I bade her show Mr. Lambert up; and during the minute which elapsed ere he made his appearance, I wondered in torturing suspense how he would greet me—how we should dare to look each other in the face! When the door opened I could not glance towards him: I sat upon the sofa with averted looks; but I was quickly startled by the tone of reckless roystering jollity and devil-me-care gaiety in which he addressed me.

"Well, Rose, my girl, so we meet at last!" he exclaimed; and instead of embracing me, or even as much as offering me his hand, he flung himself upon a chair opposite to

where I was placed. "Uncommon handsome rooms, these of yours! everything devilish nice and pleasant! So I suppose you are feathering your nest to your heart's content?"

"Oh, Cyril!" I murmured, overwhelmed with shame and confusion, and the tears pouring from my eyes: then, obedient to the impulse of that strong love which I bore my brother, I threw myself upon his breast, wound my arms about his neck, and sobbed convulsively.

"Why, what the deuce does this mean?" he exclaimed, suffering rather than reciprocating my caresses. "You don't think that I am come to blow you up? Not I indeed! On the contrary, I am uncommon glad to see you in such good feather. It was only this morning I knew where you were; or else I should have found you out before."

"Have you been long in London, Cyril?" I inquired, returning to my seat, wiping away my tears, and endeavouring to compose myself as well as I was able.

"Only about a fortnight," he answered; "and I wonder how it is that you and I have not fallen in with each other before this. But I suppose that you ride in your carriage as well as I do; and carriage-folks are less likely to observe each other than those vulgar persons who go on foot."

"Your carriage, Cyril?" I cried; smitten with even a still worse misgiving in respect to his mode of life than that which had seized upon me the preceding night at the Opera.

"Well, if not a carriage," he answered, "at all events an uncommon good substitute for one. Look here;"—and starting from his seat, he clutched me by the arm, and drew me to the

windows. "There!" he added: "you see as pretty a turn-out as any in all London."

I observed at the door a very handsome cabriolet, with a splendid horse beautifully caparisoned, —the harness indeed being too much covered with silver to be exactly consistent with good taste; and a youth in an elegant livery standing by the animal's head.

"What do you think of that?" demanded my brother fixing upon me a look of triumphant satisfaction."

"But the means, Cyril?" I said, half urgently, half reproachfully: "whence do they come? how do you obtain the resources for this costly mode of life?"

"Pon my soul!" he ejaculated with a loud boisterous laugh, "this is rather too good! Do I ask you how it is you are living in this splendidly furnished house—how you got that gold watch and chain—how it is you are surrounded by luxuries—"

"Cyril!" I murmured: and my countenance was flushed with the crimson of shame; for his words, so lightly and flippantly uttered, rendered me most excruciatingly alive to the gilded ignominy of my position; and I would much rather he had overwhelmed me with reproaches, and that he had administered upbraids, than have thus seemed to rejoice in all the evidences of his sister's degradation.

"What nonsense is this?" he ejaculated. "You would not have methink you have settled down into a steady married life. If so, you would not be still *Miss Lambert*. Never do you mind how I live: for I sha't trouble myself about your proceedings. You see that I am in good feather;

and I am glad that you are the same."

"I do not hesitate to confess, Cyril," I answered, speaking very seriously, "that having been made the victim of cold hard-heartedness first, and of treachery afterwards, I accept my destiny. But at least I do nothing that can bring me within the reach of the law——"

"What the deuce would you have me understand?" exclaimed my brother fiercely: so that his very manner enhanced all my former misgivings to an excruciating degree. "No more of that, if you please! I am not come to ask you for money——"

"If you had, Cyril," I exclaimed, vehemently, "you should have it—and in welcome!"

"Thank you, Rose," he replied coolly; "but I don't want it."

"And our parents, Cyril?" I said, scarcely daring thus to allude to those who were still so dear to me, and of whom I so often thought with bitter tears and a sad tightening at the heart.

"Oh, the old people?" responded my brother flippantly. "I have not heard of them for a long time; but I dare say that mother is still in her old easy-chair, and father, is jogging on, by the help of the brandy-bottle, much after the old style. You see, I very soon cut Hawthorn when once things had come to a certain pass—We won't, however, have any unpleasant allusions to bygone affairs. I suppose you know that the parsonage was all refurnished and the debts were paid of? So I told father that if he would give me fifty pounds, I would go and seek my fortune. I knocked about in the country for sometime; but falling in with two or three jovial blades, we made a trip to the Continent, and won a lot of money

at cards of an English gentleman whose purse was ampler than his brains. Then I came to London, about a fortnight back, as I told you just now; and here I am in full feather!"

His words, though uttered with a levity against which my soul revolted, afforded me some little relief,—inasmuch as they gave me to understand that his resources were in the gaming-table, whereas I had feared that they might have been of a far more dangerous and iniquitous character.

"And how did you find out my place of abode?" I presently inquired.

"Ah! a very extraordinary and unaccountable thing," ejaculated Cyril. "An anonymous note, written in a vile scrawling hand, little better than small pothooks and hangers strung together, was delivered at my lodgings, in Bond Street, at breakfast-time this morning. The messenger,—who, it appeared on inquiry, was a slatternly dressed female—a trull of a servant girl, I suppose,—hastened away directly she had given in the precious billet at the door. I had some trouble in deciphering it: but when I did succeed in making it out, all it contained was just this—"*Your sister, Miss Lambert, is living at No.—, Jermyn Street.*"

I could not help thinking that Horace Rockingham was at the bottom of the incident just related; and I reflected for a few moments how far the bringing together of myself and brother might possibly enter into his scheme of vengeance. At length I said, "Are you aware, Cyril, that Mr. Rockingham—I mean the young man—is in London?"

"No—I have not seen him," he responded, "I should like to!" he

added, eagerly: for though such a milksop of a boy, he has plenty of money."

"Beware of him—beware of him, Cyril!" was the passionate exclamation which burst from my lips: then perceiving that my brother was totally at a loss to comprehend me, I went on to say, in the same impetuous manner, "Yes—beware of him! he is our mortal enemy! it was he who made me his victim!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Cyril, as if a light suddenly broke in upon him: now I understand! That accounts for your having become aware of the little incident—you know what I mean—and I always wondered how the deuce you came to learn it. I thought that I must have talked in my sleep, or something."

"No, Cyril," I answered, solemnly; "it was to save you from the consequences of the deed that I surrendered myself up to Horace Rockingham! But for heaven's sake do not seek to avenge my wrongs! I wish you not to peril your life in a duel—"

"Duel be hanged! Not I indeed!" exclaimed my brother. "There is no such very great harm done, since it has been the means, directly or indirectly, of leading you to your present good fortune—"

"Good fortune!" I echoed, bitterly: but not choosing to expatiate upon that point, I hastened to observe, "Yes, Cyril: Horace Rockingham has vowed the destruction both of yourself and me: I was at the Opera last night—"

"And so was I. How strange! But I did not see you: I suppose you were in one of the boxes—but I was in the pit; and to tell you the truth, my companion—one of your sex," he added, with

a significant laugh "though as beautiful as an angel, is a very dragon of jealousy; and if she had seen me looking about at the ladies, she would have thought no more of making a scene in the place than I should of lighting my cigar. But what about last night?"

"You did not see Horace Rockingham there? No. Well, but he saw you; and it was with a fiendish delight he came to my box and pointed you out to me. Then was it that he vowed to be revenged on me through you—and perhaps likewise to include my own self in his malignant project."

"Who cares for such nonsense as this?" exclaimed my brother, contemptuously. "I am surprised at you, Rose, giving way to such stupid apprehensions. A miserable whipper-snapper like that—I will wring his neck for him the next time he happens to fall in my way!"

"Cyril," I exclaimed, "if you have the slightest regard for me—if one scintillation of that love—which you were wont to bear me remains in your breast——"

"The deuce! how marvellous sentimental you are, Rose!" interrupted my brother, with a loud boisterous laugh. "One would really think you had been reading all the love-sick, maudlin, wishy-washy novels of the day. But I know what you mean; you want me to promise that I will leave Horace Rockingham alone? Well, I am sure, if it will please you, I don't mind giving such a pledge. And now I must say good-bye; for I have promised to go and take Caroline for a drive."

"And how long," I asked "have you known this Caroline?—for I presume you are alluding to the young person whom I saw with you last night at the Opera?"

"Exactly so. How long have I known her? Only since I have been in London."

"A fortnight?" I said, inquiringly.

"Yes. The fact is, there were two floors to let at the same time in the house where I am living: and I took one. The very next day the other floor was let: and who should be the new lodger but this same Caroline Seymour? We soon got on friendly terms. The first time we met on the stairs we bowed to each other—the next time we smiled—the third time we stopped and chatted—the fourth I took her hand—the fifth I kissed her—and the sixth we came to a thorough understanding together,—all this taking place within about forty-eight hours. So you see it was a conquest rapidly made; and you must give me credit for good taste."

"I only hope, Cyril," was my observation "that she will not lead you into extravagances which you will have no possible means of sustaining."

"That's my look out!" ejaculated my brother. I shall come and see you again soon."— and with this remark he sauntered out of the apartment.

The effect of this meeting was far from calculated to cheer my spirits, already so desponding. Whatever my father and mother might have done, I could not help feeling their position deeply,—abandoned as they were in their old age by both their children, and involved in uncertainty as to our fate. I thought of writing them a letter to give some assurances that we were both alive, in good health, and doing well; but when I took up my pen for the purpose, it dropped from my hand. How could I transmit to them a falsehood which would betray it—

self? How could I hope that they would believe my tale when I dared not give them the slightest clue to our whereabouts. No: it were better, after all to leave them in their uncertainty: they might buoy themselves up with conjectures for the best—and it would therefore be cruel to destroy their illusions by making them fully aware of the worst.

Feeling wretchedly low-spirited, and not being able to settle my mind to reading, I determined to go out for a walk. I was tired of always riding in a carriage; and I thought that exercise on foot would do me good. I accordingly dressed myself in a plain, unobtrusive manner and issued forth. I proceeded into St. James's Park—entered the enclosure—and rambled round the artificial water, endeavouring to divert my mind as much as possible from the painful reflections which pressed themselves upon it. Presently I noticed a gentleman a little way in front of me, whose proceedings and gestures gradually began to attract my notice as being somewhat peculiar. Every now and then it seemed to me, as if utterly unconscious of whether he were observed or not, he literally wrung his hands. At first I fancied he must be afflicted with some malady producing this kind of spasmodic convulsions: but by degrees the impression stole upon my mind that they were the involuntary efforts of great grief or torturing despair. Then he would stop short with a singular abruptness, and gaze steadfastly for some moments on the placid smiling water which reflected the bright sunbeams in its bosom. With equal abruptness would he resume his walk: and then those convulsive wringings of the hand occurred again. I had slackened my pace

so as to keep behind him, and not pass when he stood still; for I began to feel interested in the appearances which thus struck me as so peculiar. I drew a little nearer to him, and saw that he was a young man—certainly not more than four-and-twenty—dressed in complete black: but his garments were well worn and threadbare. Nevertheless, there was an air of unmistakable gentility about him; and his apparel afforded the idea of one who did his utmost to maintain a respectable appearance, notwithstanding the poverty of his circumstances. He was not actually handsome, but might be termed good-looking: his features were delicate—their expression intensely mournful.

As I was thus surveying him, he suddenly turned his eyes upon me: they were dark blue eyes, and were replete with a pensive melancholy. As if suddenly smitten with the recollection that he might have been betraying whatsoever emotions were agitating in his heart, he turned abruptly away and hurried on. Of the middle stature, his figure was slender but well-knit; and in all respects had he the appearance of a gentleman, notwithstanding his threadbare apparel. I pitied him—and would have given much at the moment to have been enabled to learn the cause of his evident affliction: for with no other feeling than a suddenly excited sympathy on his behalf, I would have rendered him whatsoever succour lay in my power. He however sped so rapidly away that I soon lost sight of him amidst the windings of the path on that side of the ornamental water which is nearest to the Bridge Walk.

I made two or three circuits of the enclosure—but saw nothing

more of the object of my interest: and when tired with my ramble, returned home. On ascending to my own apartments, my maid Frances said to me, "The upholsterer's man has been, ma'am, to measure the windows for the new curtains."

"What upholsterer's man?" I asked. I have sent none. You know very well that I hire these lodgings ready furnished: and therefore I suppose that Mrs. Harborough purposes to have new curtains put up."

"And yet I wonder at that, ma'am," observed Frances: "for these summer curtains were quite new the other day when put up. Besides, to tell you the truth, I did not exactly like the looks of the man; and I remained in the room with him the whole time, for fear he might take it into his head to walk off with any article of value lying about."

"You acted perfectly right," was my remark. "But have you asked Mrs. Harborough whether she gave instructions—"

"The man has only just gone," responded Frances. "I will go and inquire of the landlady now."

The maid accordingly quitted the chamber where I was putting off my walking apparel; and in a few minutes she returned, with some little alarm and surprise depicted on her countenance.

"Mrs. Harborough says, ma'am, that it must be a mistake—that she gave no such orders to her upholsterer—and that she cannot understand it. The man told me as plain as he could speak, that it was for the bed-chamber where my mistress slept."

"What, then, can it mean?" I exclaimed, now really frightened; and then all in a moment the circumstance of the two ill-looking men who had evidently

watched the carriage on the day the diamonds were bought, flashed to my mind. "Either it was some very great error," I went on to observe, in a musing strain, "or else there is some deep-laid treachery in all this."

"But what treachery could there be, ma'am?" asked the maid, little re-assured by my observations.

I then related to her the circumstance which had just come back to my memory; and she begged me to acquaint Mr. Alvanly with it—which I promised to do. Nor did I forget to mention the incident: but Gustavus only laughed at my fears,—saying it was an upholsterer's error—that the wrong house had been visited—and that I need labour under no apprehension. In the course of the evening the impression wore off,—so that at length I forgot the circumstance altogether.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARTHUR BRYDGES

I Had worn during the winter some very handsome furs, which Mr. Alvanly had presented to me, and which had cost a considerable sum of money. When the warm weather set in, they had been put away somewhat carelessly; and Frances, on happening to look at them, gave me to understand that they were becoming injured. I was resolved to give them at once to a furrier to have done up; and bade Frances inquire of Mrs. Harborough if she could recommend me to any particular shop. An establishment was named in some street near Covent Garden; and availing myself of Mr. Alvanly's carriage, I took the furs with me thither. It was a small shop,

making no very great appearance: but it had been so strongly recommended, and the man seemed so thoroughly to understand his business, that I had no hesitation in entrusting the furs to his charge. The incident may seem too trivial to be recorded here: nor would it have found mention, were it not for the occurrences to which it led.

While I was still in the shop, conversing with the furrier, a woman — whom I subsequently found, to be his wife — entered from a side door, and whispered something hurriedly in his ear.

"Ah! then I suppose we shall lose our rent," he exclaimed, in angry tone, and quite loud enough for me to hear. "But we must keep his trunk — though I don't think there is much in it: for I am sure he has been making away with his things. However, it will be better than nothing. I beg your pardon, ma'am, for keeping you waiting," he said, again addressing himself to me after his wife had retired: "but I have just heard something that annoys me a little. The fact is," he went on to remark — for he was evidently a garrulously inclined individual; and moreover there was now a spite in him which rendered him talkative upon his supposed wrongs — "we have had a lodger up-stairs for some months past, who has fallen into arrears with his rent; and now, ma'am, my wife has just been in to tell me that a couple of sheriff's-officers are in the house to take him off to prison for a matter of some twenty odd pounds: so that we stand an uncommon good chance of losing what he owes us."

"And who is this person?" I inquired, not exactly knowing wherefore I should have lingered in the shop to put the question.

"Why, ma'am, he says he has been ordained for the Church," answered the tradesman; "but that the sudden death of his father about a year back put an end to all his prospects. His father, it seems, died insolvent; and the young chap has only got one other relation living — an uncle, it appears, in India or some out-of-the-way place. — But there he goes with the officers!"

The shopkeeper, as he thus spoke, rushed to his window; and putting back some furs which were hanging there, gazed forth at the departure of his lodger in company with the myrmidons of the law. I mechanically glanced towards the door at the same time, just as the prisoner was passing; and to my astonishment, I at once recognised that same young gentleman whose singular behaviour had so much struck me in St. James's Park on the preceding day.

"Is that your lodger?" I inquired quickly.

"Yes, ma'am — that's him in the seedy black," was the response.

"Then hasten to overtake the officers," I at once exclaimed, "and bid them return with him. Perhaps the affair may be settled."

The tradesman stared at me in vacant astonishment, — either fancying that I was in jest, or that he himself had not heard aright.

"Go quick," I said, "I am serious — and it will perhaps be all the better for you."

He was now convinced that it was no illusion: and doubtless inspired with agility by the hope of getting his own money, he leapt over the counter with the utmost nimbleness. The next instant he disappeared from my view: and it was not till he was gone, that I was struck by the strange light in which this pro-

ceeding on my part would appear to the young gentleman himself and the officers. It was the result of a sudden and uncontrollable impulse, arising from the deep sympathy with which the unfortunate being had inspired me on the proceeding day: and of course the step could not now be recalled. In a few minutes the tradesman re-appeared, followed by his lodger and the two sheriff's officers. It was evident from their looks that the furrier had in a few hurried words given them to understand wherefore they were requested to come back: and the young gentleman gave a sudden start—for he recognised me in a moment.

"Step into the parlour, ma'am," said the shopkeeper, bustling about in an officious manner to do the honours of his house: and I accepted the invitation, followed by the rest.

"How much is this gentleman indebted to his creditor?" I at once inquired of the officers, endeavouring in the business-like manner of my proceeding to veil the confusion which I really felt.

"Twenty-three pounds will cover it all, ma'am," was the response immediately given.

"Then here is the amount," I said, producing my purse.

"Good heavens! Providence has raised me up a friend!" murmured the released captive; and sinking down upon a seat, he burst into tears, profoundly overcome by his feelings.

The money was counted out—a receipt was promptly—written—and I now discovered that the young gentleman's name appeared as the Rev. Arthur Brydges. The officers retired; and Mr. Brydges rising from his seat, accosted me with the tears upon his countenance: but his emo-

tions were still too strong to allow him to give utterance to a single syllable of the gratitude which he was evidently so anxious to express. I made a sign for the furrier to retire; and remained alone in the little parlour with Arthur Brydges.

"Madam," he said, in a broken voice, "whoever you are, I can only regard you as an angel sent to save me. How is it that I have thus become an object of such noble generosity, which a whole life's gratitude will never be able to repay!"

"Frankly speaking," was my response—and I was much affected by the genuine fervour and unmistakable sincerity with which he had addressed me,—“I was struck by your manner in the park yesterday: I saw that you were afflicted—I perceived enough to convince me that yours was no ordinary case. I should have spoken to you if I had dared. Accident alone brought me to this shop to-day——”

"No, madam—not accident!" exclaimed Arthur Brydges in a tone of pious enthusiasm: "it was Providence!—Providence, who by its own inscrutable means led you to where your heart had already prompted you to perform a good deed—and God will bless you for having done it."

For a few moments I was so overpowered by my own feelings as to be unable to utter another word. Heaven knows that I did indeed require my maker's blessing, so unworthy had I become of all divine consideration! But assuredly there was a sweet solace in the thought that if I earned gold by my own frailty, I was not altogether selfish nor uncharitable in the expenditure of it.

"To whom, madam, am I indebted," asked Mr. Brydges, "for

this unparalleled generosity? Tell me your name, that I may mention it in my prayers."

"Never mind who I am" was my response, forgetting at the moment that the furrier had my address, and could presently satisfy the young gentleman's curiosity on this point. "The little service which I have been enabled to render you, has not been performed otherwise than as a duty towards a fellow-creature. Therefore I claim no gratitude:"—and in order to satisfy his manly pride, I added, "Perhaps, if fortune favours you, we shall meet again—and then you can repay me. Indeed I mean to lay you under this obligation—that you must accept some little farther assistance at my hands, the better to enable you sooner or later to restore the whole."

Thus speaking, I placed twenty pounds upon the table,—congratulating myself that I had happened on the occasion to bring out so much money in my purse. I was hurrying towards the door, when Mr. Brydges besought me to remain for a few moments,—exclaiming, once more in a broken voice, and with tears in his eyes, "Do let me convince you that you are not thus extending your noble generosity towards an unworthy object!"

I could not wound his feelings by hurrying away abruptly; and I accordingly took a seat,—observing. "Your landlord, who is some what talkative, made some allusion to yourself and your affairs just now—enough to convince me that you have been very unfortunate."

"I have, madam," he cried,— "Oh, very unfortunate! I was an only child. I lost my mother at an early age: I was my father's pride—he sent me to College—I

may say without vanity that the progress I made proved that I was not ungrateful for the bounties he bestowed upon me; and on attaining my twenty-third year I was duly ordained. That very same day my unfortunate father was stricken with paralysis: a week afterwards he was a corpse. He was a merchant; and, alas!—his affairs proved to be deeply involved—so much so that I found myself penniless in the world. I came to London—for our home was at Liverpool—and endeavoured to obtain clerical employment but in vain. The friends who had adhered to my father, and had promised him their interest on my behalf, all deserted me when his bankrupt circumstances were made known. For a year and upwards I have been struggling against difficulties: I have offered myself as a private tutor—as an usher in a school: but without testimonials there is naught save failure in this great metropolis, even for the most honest and deserving. I have lived by writing a few articles for an ecclesiastical periodical: my labours have been great, but miserably remunerated. Six weeks ago the periodical was discontinued; and my means of livelihood failed in an instant. I have endured much misery: but I could lay my hand upon my heart, and conscientiously affirm that I never wronged a fellow-creature. The very debt for which I was ere now arrested—and which you, madam, have so kindly liquidated—was for the balance of the expenses of my late father's funeral. Were it not for you I should have been consigned to a gaol—heaven only knows when to be emancipated! I have but one relative now living on the face of the earth—an uncle, who many long years ago went out to

India to struggle with the world, and endeavour to retrieve the fortunes which his extravagances had ruined in this country. He took his departure in anger with the other members of the family then living, because they would not supply him with the means of pursuing his profligate career in his native land. Little or no correspondence had been maintained between my deceased father and his brother: but rumours have occasionally reached us to the effect that his circumstances have improved in the far-off Indian clime—that he amassed wealth—that he has become an altered character—and that his parsimony is now equal to his extravagances of other days. I wrote to him after my parent's death—but have received no reply. The distance is very great—the time for correspondence with India is long and tedious and I am not altogether without a hope that he may remember, and exhibit some sympathy for his nephew. Nevertheless, he may perhaps harbour towards me the rancour which he cherished towards my sire: and I may never hear from him. Thanks, however, to your bounty, madam, I am now lifted up from despair. Without any affectation of false modesty, I accept that bounty because it is so generously—so kindly bestowed. It seems to me as if my fortunes were about to take a turn: but come weal, or come woe, my gratitude towards you will cease only with life itself."

"Most sincerely, Mr. Brydges, do I wish you success:"—and I hastily wiped away the tears which his pathetic narrative had brought into my eyes. Then I gave him my hand, which he pressed with the warmth of gratitude: and hurrying forth from the

house, I returned to the carriage, which drove home.

I made up my mind not to mention a word of this little incident to Mr. Alvanly. Though not naturally jealous, yet as a man of the world he would fancy that I had been swayed by some other motive besides mere compassionate sympathy in my conduct towards the Rev. Arthur Brydges; and at all events I know that he would regard me as a silly sentimental fool for having thus lavished my money upon a complete stranger. I should add that during the brief interview which took place in the furrier's parlour, I obtained a sufficient insight into the character of Arthur Brydges to convince me that he was a most amiable and excellent young man—well-principled—profoundly imbued with a sense of a religion, though without fanaticism or snivelling sanctimoniousness: and that he was altogether very different from that class of gentlemen with whom I had recently been acquainted.

I was much surprised on the following morning to receive a note from the Earl of Eveleigh, written in a most courteous strain, and requesting to be favoured with a few minutes' interview. His lordship added that he would either wait upon me at any hour I was certain to be *alone*: or that, if I thought fit, he should be happy to receive me at his own house,—likewise leaving to me the appointment of the time. I knew not exactly what to think of this missive: but the ludicrous suspicion which for the first moment flashed to my mind, speedily gave way to the reflection that something fresh must have transpired in respect to Horace Rockingham and Lady Lucia Calthorpe, in which par-

haps my intervention would again be deemed useful, I did not however choose to regard his lordship's note in the light of a summons to his own mansion: for I could not help remembering the hauteur with which he had treated me when I presented myself there: while on the other hand I had not the slightest hesitation in asking him to call upon me, as Mr. Alvanly not only knew that he had visited me before, but was also little likely to experience a feeling of jealousy on the part of an old man of seventy years of age. I accordingly wrote to the Earl, intimating that I should be happy to receive him on the following day between one and two o' clock. I did not however mention to Mr. Alvanly that any communication had been sent from Lord Eveleigh, nor that I expected such a visit: I feared lest Gustavus would fancy that I was again going to mix myself up in the affairs of Horace Rockingham; and that he would be angry at the idea of my giving farther provocation to that young man's vindictiveness.

It happened on the following day that I lay much later in bed than was my wont; and breakfast was not over until past twelve o'clock. I was still in my morning *Deshabillee*; and his lordship was to arrive at one. I calculated that I should not have time to pass through the ceremony of the toilet; and I did not choose to keep him waiting for such a purpose—for fear lest he might possibly suppose I was embellishing my person with a view of ensnaring his heart. I therefore decided upon remaining as I was; and I whiled away the time with the newspaper until the Earl of Eveleigh was announced.

I have already described him as an old man of seventy with

white hair, an aristocratic gait, cold and reserved manners: but no sooner did he make his appearance, than I was struck by the extreme urbanity and indeed most courteous politeness with which he accosted me. He had evidently dressed himself with a careful precision, and as he had come on foot, I observed that he glanced down at his well-polished boots, while taking a seat, to assure himself that they were not dusty. He had on lemon-coloured gloves—a flower in his button-hole—and looked altogether the old beau. Was it possible, I asked myself, that the ludicrous suspicion which had flashed to my mind on the previous day was about to receive its verification, and that the suggestion of my after-thought had nothing to do with the object of this visit? Notwithstanding what was passing in my mind, I kept my countenance completely,—receiving his lordship with only a distant politeness, and at once assuming a look as if I awaited prompt explanation of the business which had brought him thither.

"If you had honoured me with a visit, Miss Lambert," said the Earl of Eveleigh,—speaking in the blandest tones, and with a most urbane smile,—"I should have been very happy to have received you."

"I suppose therefore, my lord," was my sarcastic response, "that your family must be all out of town. Or else," I added coldly, "you again requist my services on a particular subject."

"Oh! as for the latter point," exclaimed his lordship, "that was all settled at the time. We have never since heard anything of young Mr. Rockingham. By the bye, I should observe that his father did call upon me a few

days after the explosion which took place: but I of course refused to see him. As for my family, Miss Lambert, you are quite right: they are out of town. Lady Eveleigh's health is bad; and she is down with the young people, at our seat in Staffordshire. So you see I am quite a bachelor;"—and his antiquated countenance was again wreathed into a smile.

"May I request, my lord, to be informed of your object in seeking an interview with me?"

"How is it possible," exclaimed the old nobleman, "that any person who has once seen you could do otherwise than long for the pleasure of beholding you again?"

"And yet, my lord," I answered frigidly and distantly, "on the first occasion when I intruded myself on your presence, you did not seem to regard it as very agreeable."

"Ah, Miss Lambert!" he at once rejoined, in a deprecating voice. "I did not know you then as I afterwards did—and as I was soon led to esteem you! You did me an essential service: I have thought of it ever since—yes, I have thought of it with gratitude: and gratitude, you are aware, is akin to——"

"He stopped short, as if suddenly smitten with the ludicrous inconsistency of the word "love" being mentioned by the lips of an old man of seventy: and I was just on the point of bursting forth into a peal of laughter, when it struck me that I ought not to treat the affair as a ludicrous one—but to resent it: for it was now no longer possible to mistake the motive of his visit.

"Yes, Miss Lambert," he went on to say, with the blandest smiles into which he could possi-

bly wreath his lips, "I have thought of you ever since!"

"But, my lord," I exclaimed, "if you have merely come hither to tell me this, you have given yourself a great deal of trouble for nothing."

"Do not speak thus harshly—do not, my dear Miss Lambert, I conjure you! There is nothing," continued the old Earl, in a somewhat excited manner, "that I would not do to win a single smile from your lips. Tell me—is there any way in which my interest can serve you? Have you any relation or friend for whom I can do anything? You have but to speak. A word from me to one of the Ministers would obtain Government employment—Church preferment—no matter what! Pray do give me an opportunity of testifying my—my—gratitude."

Again he dared not give utterance to the word "love," although I comprehended full well that it was at the moment on the very tip of his tongue. I had been about to rise from my seat, wish his lordship "good morning," and ring the bell for the front-door to be opened to show him out,—when all of a sudden a thought struck me. That phrase of "Church preferment" recalled Arthur Brydges to my memory; and for a few moments I reflected that there would be no very great harm in turning to that young man's advantage the foolish fancy which the old dotard had conceived in respect to myself.

"But, my lord," I answered, with a slight unbending from the glacial reserve which I had hitherto assumed, "I do not rightly comprehend wherefore you should wish to make me the recipient of your bounties. For that affair of some months back I assured your lordship at the

time that I required no recompense and would receive none."

"My dear Miss Lambert," he responded, drawing his chair a little closer to where I was seated—for he was evidently encouraged by the somewhat more conciliatory demeanour which I had adopted—"it need not take a thousand words to assure you that you have inspired me with the liveliest interest. Now, I am not so vain or conceited as to suppose for an instant that any reciprocal sentiment can be entertained: but under certain circumstances I will study my best to make myself agreeable to you. I am rich: I know under whose protection you are dwelling now: where *he* can supply hundreds, I would lavish thousands: instead of living in furnished lodgings, you should have a splendid mansion of your own—domestics—equipages—everything, in short, that could testify the love with which you have inspired me!"

This time the word was at length spoken; and it sounded both ludicrous and horrible when coming from the lips of an old man tottering on the very verge of the grave, and who was indeed but little better than an animated corpse. There was something loathsome in the advances which he had thus unequivocally made me—advances which I could scarcely forbear from repudiating with abhorrence and resenting with scorn. But I thought to myself that it would be as well if the infatuated old man received a signal lesson,—so that by turning his insane passion to an account, I could not merely serve an excellent young gentleman, but likewise revenge myself on one who dared to make such insulting proposals.

"My lord," I said, composing my countenance and modulating my voice in such a manner that I appeared to be touched with everything which had fallen from his lips,—*"I cannot feel otherwise than honoured and flattered by this favourable opinion which your words imply: but I dare not all in a moment break off my connexion with a gentleman who has treated me kindly. When I come to know your lordship a little better—"*

"Ah! then, dearest, sweetest Miss Lambert, I am not altogether without hope!"—and that old man of seventy—an animated corpse, as I ere now described him—sank down upon one knee, took my hand in his own lank withered fingers, and pressed it to his lips. *"You are beautiful—eminently beautiful!"* he went on to say, gazing up at me with gloating look as I slowly disengaged my hand. Yes—you are the lovellest of women; and there is no sacrifice which I would not make on your account. That charming *deshabille* becomes you admirably—

"Rise, my lord! for heaven's sake, rise!" I said, really alarmed lest any one should enter the room while he knelt at my feet. "A servant might come in suddenly—"

"True, my sweet Miss Lambert!" he exclaimed. "I would not compromise you for the world. But you tell me that I may hope—"

"I have given your lordship to understand," was my answer, "that when I come to know you better, it is possible—nay, probable—"

"Ah, thank you for that word!" he ejaculated: and his attenuated form was still trembling all over with the thrill which the contact

of my hand with his had sent through it. "I see that you will accept my overtures—I need not despair—I shall yet be happy! But is there nothing I can do to convince you of my sincerity—my affection—my devotion?"

"I could possibly name something," was my response, given as if it were the result of a few moments' deliberation, "which would put your lordship to the test, and at the same time more or less render me a service."

"Name it, Miss Lambert—name it, I conjure you!" cried the Earl, with eagerness. "Ah! I am so delighted that you consent to afford me an opportunity of serving you! What can I do?"

"If I ere now understood your lordship aright," I went on to say, "you possess sufficient interest with the present Government to obtain Church preferment?"

"Assuredly! The Lord Chancellor is my most intimate friend; he is always certain to have a living or two in his gift—Besides, there are half-a-dozen bishops with whom I am equally intimate; and a single word from me would effect all you desire. Tell me in whom you are interested—and I will run about, my sweet Miss Lambert, from one to the other until I obtain what is sought. I will not even ask you to see me again until my promise is fulfilled: but depend upon it that it will be in a day or two!"

"I must confess that I am deeply touched," was my answer, by your lordship's kindness. "The individual in whom I am interested, is a certain Arthur Brydges—a most deserving young gentleman—For heaven's sake, my lord, fancy not for a moment that aught of impropriety has ever taken place between him and me No; most solemnly and sacredly

do I assure you that I believe his morals to be as privately correct as his character is untarnished. Indeed, he scarcely knows me: and as a proof that what I am telling you is correct, my name must not be mentioned in the matter."

"Dearest Miss Lambert," exclaimed the Earl, "you need not give me all these assurances: you have only to dictate your will, and I will obey it. Proceed! How is the business to be managed?" continued the infatuated old man; and then he added in a perfect access of delight which contrasted most strangely indeed with the frigid hauteur which he had worn on the first occasion when I ever saw him,— "Oh, I am so rejoiced to think that I can do anything to serve you!"

"And I am grateful to your lordship for this readiness to oblige me. Mr. Brydges resides at this place:"—and I hastened to write down the address of the furrier's shop. "If your lordship would condescend to call upon him—say it has indirectly reached your ears that he seeks employment in his vocation—that you have inquired as to his merits—and that you have obtained for him a curacy or a living, whichever it may be—

"A living, my dear Miss Lambert—and a good one too!" cried the old Earl. "Will four or five hundred a year satisfy his expectations?"

Much less will be sufficient, my lord," I answered. And, indeed, I should prefer that it was something moderate; so that he may be the less astonished at the mystery which, in spite of all you can say, will to a certain extent hang round the proceeding. But should he ask you whether any

lady has spoken to you on his behalf, you must deny it. Still more especially," I went on to observe hurriedly, as I now recollected that the furrier might have mentioned my name to Arthur Brydges, "should he speak to you of Miss Lambert, you are to declare, with all possible effrontery, that you know not such a person! Will you do this, my lord? In short, will you conduct the transaction with so much delicacy and tact that Mr. Brydges cannot possibly suspect its origin?"

"Trust to me, Miss Lambert," responded the infatuated old man. "Your word is now my law. You will permit me," he added, softening his voice as well as his looks into as much tenderness as possible, "to pay my respects again?"

"When you can come to announce that my wishes are fulfilled. But no!" I ejaculated, as the idea struck me that the Earl might call when Mr. Alvanly was present: "you must not come without a previous appointment. Do you understand me?"

"I do, my sweetest Miss Lambert," he answered; and again taking my hand in his wrinkled fingers, he pressed it to his lips: then drawing on his lemon-coloured kid-glove, he made a most courteous bow and issued from the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BURGLARY.

MR. ALVANLY came to dine with me in the evening; but his Parliamentary duties took him away at nine o'clock; and he intimated that he should not see me again until the following morning. I amused myself with a novel until

about half-past ten,—when I retired to my chamber. Frances assisted, as usual, to disapparel me; and when she was retiring, I bade her leave the wax-lights burning, as I intended to sit up a little longer and read ere seeking my couch. Indeed, I felt no inclination for slumber. It was not that anything particular was on my mind, more than those thoughts of home, of my brother, of my own degraded position, and of Horace Rockingham's threatened vengeance, which were accustomed to obtrude upon my brain; but to these I had got so used if the phrase be allowable, that they entered as it were into my very existence itself. But there are times when this disinclination to seek one's couch is experienced—when one has a certain vague and undefined impulse to sit up; and so it was with me on the present occasion. It was a fashionable novel which I was reading; and having turned over its pages for about three-quarters of an hour after Frances had retired, its very dulness and insipidity gave me that sense of fatigue which had not come naturally. I found myself yawning at length—then getting drowsy; and I retired to bed. I did not however extinguish the wax-lights; for when I was by myself, I always had candles burning in the room.

The mere effort of getting to bed aroused me up completely again, and shook-off the soporific effects of the dull novel. I could not get to sleep. I heard the clock strike twelve: another hour dragged its slow length along—and one was proclaimed by the iron tongue of Time. Then a drowsiness came over me; a sort of dreamy repose followed—until at length I was sound asleep. Without knowing how long I had

slumbered, it appeared to me that I gradually—not suddenly—awoke to the consciousness that something of an alarming nature was taking place; and this idea expanded into the clearer conviction that I was in positive danger. Now it was that I started up suddenly, wide awake: and at the same instant, ejaculations in rude gruff voices fell upon my ears. There were two men in the chamber!—and those men, I recognised them in a moment—they were the same who had watched the carriage on the day the diamonds were purchased! One had his hands upon the very casket itself at the instant I started up: the other raised a heavy club to deal me a blow—but my lips all in a moment sent forth such piercing shrieks and rending cries, that the ruffians were seized with a sudden panic and disappeared from my view. I tore at the bell-pull which hung near the bed's head: then I sprang from the couch, on the farthest side from the door by which burglars had just disappeared; but the glance which I flung on the table where the jewel-casket had stood, showed me that it was gone. The entire household was aroused: I heard doors opening, and persons flying about in every direction. Frances was the first to reach my chamber: but all I could cry out was, "The diamonds! my jewel-casket! they are gone!"

"Gone?" echoed the maid, in wildest affright: and instead of being enabled to soothe me, she was now nearly fainting with terror.

Throwing on a morning wrapper, and snatching one of the wax-lights from the branches attached to the mirror on the toilet-table, I rushed from the room. The cook and the housemaid, both in their

night-clothes—as Frances herself was—met me on the landing: I bade them go and convey Frances to her room—and then hurried down the stairs. A scuffle was taking place—something heavy dropped—it was evidently the casket falling in the hall below. Then there was a hasty rush of footsteps—a door was banged violently—and I heard a voice say, "Well, let the rascals go, since they have left their booty behind!"

But that voice—It was Captain Fortescue's!

"Are you hurt? have you received any injury? Speak, speak!" said another voice, in a half-hushed under tone, but nevertheless in accents full of terror and excitement:—and this second voice was Mrs. Harbrough's.

"Nothing serious—only a bruise from the rascal's bludgeon," was Captain Fortescue's response. "But let us see whether any harm has been done up-stairs."

I had stopped short on the first landing at the sound of the Captain's voice: and there I remained riveted, not merely with terror at the violent scuffle which I heard, but likewise in astonishment that he should be there. In a moment, however, I comprehended the truth: it was indeed evident enough that Mrs. Harbrough, who slept on the ground-floor, had not retired to rest that night without a companion. Scarcely had I come to this conclusion, when Captain Fortescue made his appearance on the landing where I had stopped short. He had evidently only time, when first alarmed by the noise in the house, to hurry on his pantaloons and a pair of slippers: his countenance was now flushed with excitement—his shirt was torn in several places—and there was the mark of severe blow with

a bludgeon upon his forehead. He carried the casket in his hand; and the moment he perceived me, exclaimed, "Thank heaven, you have sustained no violence!"

"No, none—nothing beyond a terrific fright," was my answer; and then I expressed my gratitude for the part he had borne in the transaction: but still, though I felt really thankful, it was with a certain coldness that I spoke—for I could not subdue a sensation of jealous resentment at the discovery of his amour with Mrs. Harbrough. As I received the casket from his hand, he pressed mine and fixed his looks upon me: but I rapidly turned away—and murmuring a few more words expressive of my gratitude, hurried back to my chamber. I secured the jewel casket under lock and key; and then repaired to my maid's room to see how she was, I found her much better; and having assured herself and the other domestics that no further danger was to be apprehended, retraced my way to my own apartment. But it may be readily supposed that I slept a little more that night; and I was heartily glad when morning came.

It appeared, from an investigation instituted by Captain Fortescue after he had parted from me on the stairs, that the burglars had forced an entry at the back part of the premises. That there was no collusion with any one inside the house, was apparent enough, inasmuch as no facilities had been afforded for the admission of the villains. All the doors and windows had been secured as usual ere the household retired to rest; and according to Captain Fortescue's judgment, the operations to effect an entry must have taken at least half-an-hour. A piece of the shutters of the scullery had

been completely cut out with a centre-bit and a saw, so as to remove the bolt, and thus had the burglars gained admission. Then, a door fastened on the inner side, and therefore secured against them, had been likewise opened by violence; and this barrier once passed, there was none other to obstruct their progress. I should observe that it was not my habit to lock my own chamber-door—because, when alone, I usually retired to bed before Frances left me; and did not rise in the morning until she came in to call me: but thenceforth I resolved to take better precautions. There could be no doubt that the man who came on the pretext of measuring the windows for new curtains was an accomplice of the burglars,—his object being to ascertain the room in which I slept. Perhaps, too, if Frances had not taken the precaution to remain with him, he would have availed himself of that opportunity to break open the cupboards and drawers and carry of whatsoever valuables he could lay his hand upon.

While I was sitting at breakfast Mrs. Harbrough, having knocked at the room-door, made her appearance. She entered with the coolest effrontery, and with her wonted bland smile upon her countenance, just for all the world as if nothing had happened in respect to herself. For a moment I felt indignant at what I considered her shameless impudence and brazen hardihood: but the next instant I reflected that it was not for me to manifest resentment—and that if I were to utter a word in that sense, she had it in her power to retort keenly and cuttingly in respect to my own position. Still I could not help treating her with a cold reserve, which she however affected not to

perceive—and took a chair unbidden.

"I am truly glad my dear Miss Lambert," she began. "that you sustained nothing more serious than a fright. Dear me! if those splendid diamonds had been carried off, what a loss it would have been! And how fortunate that Captain Fortescue should have been in the house at the time! Of course we must make no stir in the matter: because if we sent for the police, went before a magistrate or anything of that sort, it would only drag all our names very unpleasantly before the public."

"I have no inclination to take any step which may produce such consequences:"—but it was more on my own account than either for the sake of Mrs. Harborough or Reginald Fortescue, that I thus spoke—for I was very much annoyed with them both: but I did not wish my own name to be paraded in the newspapers.

"I am glad you take this view of the matter," replied Mrs. Harborough. "Captain Fortescue has been breakfasting with me, and wishes to know whether he may pay you his respects before he takes his leave?"

"I feel too unwell to see any one," was my answer, coldly given. "But I beg you to renew my thanks to Captain Fortescue for the great service which he rendered me."

I saw that Mrs. Harborough's countenance expressed satisfaction when she heard me decline to see the Captain; and assuring me that she would not forget to deliver my message, she left the room. About an hour afterwards, my brother called,—arriving in his elegant equipage, and as fashionably dressed as on the previous occasion. He came for

no particular purpose—but merely, as he said, to while away an idle half-hour with a chat; and his conversation was so flippant—he gave himself such airs, and made such a boast of the reckless life he was leading,—talked so coarsely, too, of his beautiful mistress, Caroline Seymour,—that I felt myself frequently wondering whether I was not in the midst of a dream, and whether this could possibly be that same high-minded Cyril, with lofty and generous aspirations, that I had known as my brother previous to the fatal deed whence his downfall might be dated. He upbraided me for being cool at one moment, mawkishly sentimental at another—and finally took his leave some what abruptly. I was glad when he was gone: for I did not want him to encounter Mr. Alvanly, to whom I had revealed all the circumstances connected with Horace Rockingham: and I of course felt that it would not be very pleasant for Gustavus to find himself in the company of a young man who was branded with a felon's crime.

My brother had not long taken his departure when Gustavus arrived; and he was much excited and astonished on hearing of the burglary. He was greatly concerned, too, on my account—but expressed his gratification that I had escaped with nothing more than a serious fright. He could not help laughing at the incident which threw up Captain Fortescue as a champion in the matter; and when I looked annoyed at this mirth, he rallied me, but in a perfectly good-humoured manner.

"You think," I said, "that I am too particular? And yet, Gustavus you would never forgive me if I gave you reason to suspect my constancy. Do you suppose that

because I am what I am, I have no feeling of decency left? and is it even wise on your part to let me incur the risk of such immoral examples?"

"Well, dearest Rose," he responded, "perhaps it was unkind and improper of me to treat the matter so lightly. But, seriously speaking if you wish to change your quarters; you shall do so—although the term for which I took these apartments will not expire for the next three months.

"I certainly would not put you to any unnecessary expense," I rejoined: "but at the expiration of the period I would like to remove elsewhere."

"It shall be done, Rose: you shall have a house of your own. And therefore now let me see the smiles come up to your beautiful countenance once more."

Three days after these incidents, I received a note from Lord Eveleigh stating that my commands had been fulfilled, and begging permission to pay his respects to me. I at once wrote an answer to the effect that he might call upon me in the evening; as I knew that Mr. Alvanly had a dinner-party at his own house, and would not therefore be with me. Punctual at the appointed hour—namely, eight o'clock—the old Earl made his appearance, attired with even greater precision and looking more like the antiquated beau than on the former occasion. He entered the room with a smiling, smirking countenance; and advanced with a mincing gait to take my hands as I rose to receive him. Again did I contrast his demeanour with the frigid reserve and cold sternness that he had worn when I had presented myself at his own mansion; and I could not help thinking of the ludicrous changes that are

wrought in the human nature by the heart's infatuation, and how the tender passion can make persons commit the greatest follies.

Although I indicated a chair, the Earl placed himself next to me on the sofa, and I saw that he flattered himself his conquest was nearly complete. For a moment I experienced a feeling of remorse at having trifled with the old man: but it quickly passed away when I recollected how he had treated me at his own mansion, and how he had shrunk from me with loathing and disgust when I proclaimed my lost condition. I could not help feeling, too, a thrill of triumph and satisfaction at having seen at my feet, suing for my favours, this very nobleman who had treated me in that manner.

"Sweetest Miss Lambert," he said, his eyes deavouring me with their regards, so that he resembled an old satyr dressed up in the most exquisitely youthful style of fashion,—“you see that I have lost no time in fulfilling your behest. The Rev. Arthur Brydges was yesterday appointed to the living of Elmwood in Hampshire. I followed your direction to the very letter: not for the world would I have deviated from them! I accordingly solicited a moderate incumbency for the young man, and he will possess an income of about two hundred and fifty pounds a year.”

"I am exceedingly grateful to your lordship," was my answer: and again was I smitten with a self-reproach at my conduct towards the old nobleman who was so zealous in carrying out my wishes.

"You know that I require no thanks," he hastened to observe. "But let me give you some little account of my interview with

Mr. Brydges: I called upon him yesterday, in the afternoon, and found him at home at his lodgings. I announced myself as the Earl of Eveleigh; and he was naturally astonished at the visit. I told him that certain circumstances with regard to his positions and merits had come to my knowledge—whereupon he at once asked me if my informant was a lady by the name of Lambert? Bearing your instructions in mind I protested that I knew no such person: and I assured him that it was entirely by accident I had heard of him. He launched forth into the most enthusiastic praises of your generous conduct towards him: he told me all that you had done; and therefore I saw that he was indeed almost a stranger to you. Ah! my dear Miss Lambert, it was very kind on your part: but are you sure that you were not smitten with some little feeling of a more tender character than compassionate interest on the part of Mr. Brydges? I can assure you that for the moment I felt jealous of him—

"And yet," I exclaimed, half inclined to laugh at the manner of almost piteous seriousness with which the antiquated Earl gave utterance to these words,—
"and yet your own good sense must have told you that I entertained no feeling of the sort—I mean the one to which you have alluded."

"True! I believe you, my sweetest Miss Lambert. But you will forgive me if I felt a little uneasy. However, to make my story short, I informed Mr. Brydges of his nomination to Elmwood; and it was some minutes before he would believe me. I had to repeat the assurance two or three times; and then he was overwhelmed with gratitude.

I bade him lose no time in setting off for his incumbency; and by the bye, I did do something that was not altogether in your instructions—I insisted upon his acceptance of a sum of money to help him on until his income should be due. Then I took my departure: and now, dear Miss Lambert, have I not merited favour in your eyes?"

"I again assure your lordship," was my response, "that I am infinitely obliged for all you have done, as well as for the tact and delicacy with which you carried out the transaction. But tell me—you left Mr. Brydges fully impressed with the conviction that all this emanated not from me?"

"Rest satisfied on that head," answered the Earl. "And now," he went on to say, with looks of eager hope, "have you reflected on the propositions I made you the other day? But yes—I am certain you have! you will accept them!" and as he thus spoke he endeavoured to pass his arm round my waist.

"Oh, my lord!" I exclaimed, at once drawing myself away: "do you not recollect the assurance I gave you that we must know each other better?"

"Dearest Miss Lambert," he ejaculated, looking piteously disappointed. "I flattered myself—that is, I thought—you were putting me to the test—Tell me what more can I do for you?"

"I will tell you, my lord," I quickly rejoined. "Wait in patience until you hear from me again. I require a little more reflection—I must think of this favour which you have done me—I will write to you."

"In a few days?" he ejaculated, eagerly: "will it be in a few days? You cannot be so cruel as to keep me long on the tender-

hooks of suspense! Remember what I have promised—a splendid mansion—domestics—equipages—all that wealth can purchase!”

“I have not forgotten. But I must put your patience to the test: I must be convinced that you really love me, and that this is no sudden freak or fancy on your part. Now leave me, my lord—I beseech you to leave me, and if you wish to prove the sincerity of your affection, you will submit to my conditions—you will wait in patience—”

“I will wait, since you command it,” interrupted the infatuated old dotard; “but it will not be with patience.”

Nevertheless, you will wait: and with that promise I must be satisfied. You must not endeavour to approach me,” I went on to say;—“you must not write to me until you hear from me.

“But you promise, sweetest dearest Miss Lambert,” said the Earl, “that when I do hear from you, it shall be in a favourable sense.”

“Most solemnly I promise, my lord,” I replied that “when you do hear from me, it shall be that—But you comprehend—I need say no more.”

“No. no—I understand! You give me every hope—every encouragement! But pray write soon. One kiss on this fair hand and I leave you.”

I suffered him to have his way in this respect, and he thereupon took his departure, filled with hopes which I was determined should prove the veriest delusions. I could not find it in my heart, after his conduct to Arthur Brydges, to dismiss him summarily according to my original intention: I had therefore adopted this course of getting rid of him for the time, resolving that

after an interval, more or less long as my phantasy and convenience should dictate, I would write and break off matters altogether.

On the following day Mr. Alvanly did not call: nor did he send me any note or message to account for his absence. The day next ensuing passed in the same manner: he did not make his appearance—neither did I receive any intelligence from him. I feared that he was ill; and being very uneasy, sent a note to him in the evening, making inquiries. My servant brought back a verbal message, to the effect that Mr. Alvanly was quite well, and that he would call upon me on the following day at twelve o’ clock. This communication struck me as being cool; and my uneasiness on his account was now turned into annoyance. I was afraid there was something wrong. The absence of Gustavus evidently had not arisen from indisposition; and for this absence he had sent no apology. What could it mean? Had scandalous tongues been injuring me? Was Horace Rokingham insidiously and secretly working out his threat of vengeance? or had Gustavus heard that I received Lord Eveleigh’s visits, and could he really be jealous of the old nobleman? I was bewildered with my conjecture; and longed for the moment to come when there should be an explanation. Not that I loved Mr. Alvanly: I have already stated that such was not the case: but it did not of course suit my purpose to offend him—and I was impatient at the idea of my constancy being suspected. I passed a restless and uneasy night; and on the following day, as the hour for his coming approached, I experienced a nervousness which I could not shake

off. Punctual to the moment, he made his appearance; and as he entered the room, I at once discerned, that there was constraint and coldness in his manner. He did not embrace me as was his wont—but took a chair, saying, “I have come, Rose, according to my promise.”

“And might I inquire,” I asked, suddenly feeling offended by his behaviour, and all my nervousness passing away in a moment, “why you have continued absent without even condescending to communicate with me?”

“Ask yourself, Rose,” was the response,—“look into your own heart, and see if there be nothing in those depths which will account for my proceedings?”

“I can, Gustavus!” I exclaimed, much excited: “and at once do I declare that your suspicions wrong me?”

“I am sorry, Rose,” he went on to observe, gently but not angrily, “that you have soon become an adept in deception. Perhaps it has not been altogether without some fault on my side. I remember that the other day you bade me observe how I might repent leaving you in the presence of immoral examples: but I must confess that I placed reliance on your strength of mind, your integrity—I will even say more—the delicacy of your feelings——”

“Good heavens. Gustavus!” I ejaculated, indignation and excitement having checked my power of utterance while he had been thus speaking: “what do you mean? Explain yourself, sir! No matter how we stand with regard to each other, you have not the right to come and accuse me wrongfully!”

“Ah, Rose!” said Mr. Alvanly, evidently speaking more in sorrow than in anger, “do not, I beseech

you, assume a hardihood as a mask for your misconduct.”

“This is intolerable!” I exclaimed, feeling that my countenance was red with indignation, “Do you mean to sit here covering me with reproaches which I do not merit, and without offering the slightest ground for your accusations? If you are tired of me, sir,” I added, bitterly, “say so at once—and I will depart hence. I have not forgotten that these rooms are yours—hired by you, though occupied by me—”

“Calm yourself, Rose,” said Gustavus, with the air of a man who was confident in the strength of his own position. “I have sought no pretext for a separation: but since you require that I shall descend to particulars, be it so.”

“Proceed, sir,” I said, with an air of defiance—for I was exceedingly indignant: indeed my anger and my wounded pride got the better of my reason—or else I might have again reflected, as I had done on the previous evening, that there was perhaps some little cause for the provocation of my protector’s jealousy.

“You will not deny, Rose, that Lord Eveleigh,” he went on to say, looking me very earnestly in the face, “has frequently visited you of late?”

“No: I do not deny it—that is to say, I admit not the word *frequently*: but I confess that his lordship has been hither twice without your knowledge. But it is possible that you can for a moment imagine.”——

“I had a right to imagine anything and everything after what I had learnt in respect to Lord Eveleigh’s visits,” rejoined Mr. Alvanly: “and now your own admissions confirm my previous fears. Think you that I am ignorant of his lordship’s character! Though

tottering on the verge of the grave, there is not a more profligate old nobleman in respect to women."

"It may be so—and I dare say it is," I exclaimed. "But here! read these notes. You will see that the first, dated some days back, respectfully solicits an interview: the other one of a more recent date, informs me of a certain behest of mine being done, and requesting another interview. Are these billets written in a style which justify your suspicions? But I will frankly confess that his lordship made me overtures; and I availed myself of his infatuation to provide for a person in whom I was interested. That is the behest to which he alludes; and when he came a second time I disembarrassed myself of him. Would you have farther proof? I will send for him now; and you shall listen to whatsoever takes place between us."

Mr. Alvanly read the notes—and for an instant was evidently staggered. He threw an uneasy glance towards me, as if half inclined to confess that he had been deceived: but a shade again came over his countenance as another subject evidently arose in his mind.

"We will put Lord Eveleigh out of the question," he said: "but there is another particular which I am bound to mention. I gave you certain acquaintances—persons who were known to me; but you have formed the acquaintance of another whom I do not know even by name. Who, Rose, is the young, handsome, and fashionably dressed man who visits you in his elegant equipage?"

"Who?" I exclaimed with all the triumph of one innocence is proven. "My own brother!"

"Ah! if this be true," he ejaculated, his countenance lighting up

with joy—and he half extended his arms towards me.

"True?" I echoed, still indignantly: "it is true—and I will tell you wherefore, I did not mention the circumstance in your hearing. But can you not understand that it was through a feeling of delicacy?—did I not explain to you one day how my unfortunate brother committed a crime? And could I suppose that you would be very well pleased to learn that he visited me? However, for my own sake I am compelled to make the avowal now—"

"Rose—dearest Rose" interrupted Mr. Alvanly, thoroughly, humiliated and ashamed. "I have to ask your pardon for this jealousy on my part:"—and placing himself next to me on the sofa, he lavished his caresses with sincerity and fervour.

"Tell me," I said, still maintaining a certain degree of coolness—for I was excessively hurt at this scene,—"tell me how this jealousy of yours came to be excited?"

"By anonymous letters," responded Alvanly,—"two three of them, one after the other—and written in different hands—but all evidently feigned—"

"Ah!" I murmured, as a conviction struck to my mind: "I have little difficulty in conjecturing their origin. That mortal enemy of mine, the vile Horace Rockingham! I am confident it is he who has been endeavouring to work out his diabolical threats of vengeance! But how came you to put faith," I asked, reproachfully, "in anonymous letters?"

"Rose," replied Gustavus, "you know that I am not naturally jealous—indeed I had the most perfect confidence in you; but those letters certainly made an impression on me—However, I have

asked you pardon; and you will give it?" Again he embraced me, and then said, "So Eveleigh made you overtures."

"To prove to you, Gustavus," I rejoined, still slightly cool and distant, "how totally undeserving I am of those injurious suspicions which have kept you away from me, you should suffer me to send for the Earl of Eveleigh and make him repeat, while you are a concealed listener, all the brilliant propositions of which he was so lavish! Asplendid mansion—state—lavish equipages—troops of servants—an income consisting of thousands—There!" I ejaculated, having worked myself up to a degree of excitement again, "those were the propositions!—and my reward for resisting the temptation is to be neglected by you and become the object of your jealousy!"

Gustavus did not immediately make me any answer: he appeared to be somewhat absent and abstracted, as if revolving quite another matter in his mind.

"Do you hear me?" I ejaculated, piqued by his manner: "do you hear what I have been saying?"

"I do, I do, dearest Rose," he quickly responded. "Forgive me for my seeming indifference: it was only apparent—not real. I was thinking of how I could, by affording you some new pleasure, make some sort of a recompense for my unkind conduct. Would you like to go to a masqued ball?"

"A masqued ball;" I exclaimed, suddenly delighted with the idea: for everything in the shape of variety and change was agreeable to me. "Yes—I have never seen one. But do you mean me to go in costume?"

"Certainly—and well disguised too," responded Alvanly. "It will

take place exactly this day week. Meanwhile you have plenty of time to provide yourself with such a dress as you may think most becoming, and that will please your fancy. But remember—it must be one that is either to be accompanied by a mask, or else a very thick veil several times folded."

"And shall you also go in fancy costume?" I inquired. "Most assuredly. It is imperative, according to the card of invitation, that all guests should present themselves in character."

"And where is it to take place?" I asked.

"Now, my dear Rose," rejoined Gustavus good-humouredly, "don't put any more questions—but suffer me to cater for your amusement. Depend upon it, you will be highly entertained; and you will see, too, quite a different society from that which you have hitherto mingled with since you were in this house. Come—let us discuss the costumes which will be most appropriate for us both."

I was so pleased with the prospect of the masqued ball, that all my vexation and annoyance at the previous scene forgotten; and I entered with zest and spirit into the discussion with regard to the fancy-dresses. It was finally concluded that I should go as an Andalusian Lady, the mask and Spanish mantilla being calculated to afford a most effectual disguise: while Mr. Alvanly resolved to adopt the costume of a gay gallant of the Elizabethan age, so that he might personify Sir Walter Raleigh.

CHAPTER X.

THE MUSQUERADE.

THE appointed evening came; and though the carriage was not to be at the door until half-

past eight o'clock, yet I commenced my toilet a little before seven—indeed, immediately after dinner. Mr. Alvanly did not dine with me on the occasion: he remained at his house in order that he might have the assistance of his valet for his own costume; and he was to come and fetch me in the carriage. I had the hairdresser to arrange my hair in the most becoming style: it was accordingly disposed in bands, with a knot high up at the back of the head in which the comb was to be fixed to retain the veil flowing over the mantilla. Frances, entering fully into the spirit of the proceeding, took infinite pains with me; and my dressmaker had done me the fullest justice in the fashion of the dark, handsome, and elegant sevillian costume which I had chosen. The body was of velvet, the skirt of satin, this latter being short—scarcely descending indeed below the swell of the leg: but Frances assured me that this was all the better, inasmuch as I possessed beautiful feet and ankles. The reader will be pleased to recollect it is *her* compliment that I am recording, and not a little piece of self-bestowed flattery in which I am indulging. But, after all, there is no harm for me to say *now* that I was *then* a very lovely creature, in the bloom of my beauty—without the slightest trace of dissipation upon my plump cheeks and the contours of my shape in full rich development, with the unmarred freshness of youth. The black silk stockings, worked and perforated up the sides—and the elegant satin slippers, set off to the utmost advantage those feet and ankles which had been the subject of my maid's eulogium. The veil and mantilla were duly adjusted: and the black

silk mask was fixed over my countenance. Through the eyelet holes I surveyed myself with pride and satisfaction in the full-length mirror which reflected my entire form; and then I proceeded to the drawing-room to await the arrival of Mr. Alvanly.

My toilet had occupied such a length of time that I was not kept many minutes waiting; and punctual at half-past eight, the carriage drove up to the door. Gustavus ascended to the drawing room, not merely to see how I looked, but also to display his own costume. He was quite enchanted with my appearance; and I was as much pleased with his own. Though not handsome, he had an elegant figure; and as his countenance was concealed by the mask, all attention would be riveted on the graceful symmetry of his form, which was set off by the elegant apparel which he had chosen for the occasion. His doublet—his plumed toque—the short cloak, hanging with a half-negligent air over his left shoulder—the tightly fitting hose—the thin rapier—the elaborately worked lace collar—and the ruffles,—all were in complete keeping with the costume of that age, one of whose heroes he had chosen to represent. He handed me down to the carriage, which immediately drove away,—the coachman evidently having already received his instructions.

"And now, my dear Gustavus," I said, as I sat by his side in the vehicle, and observed that it turned into Piccadilly, along which it proceeded in the direction of Kensington,—“perhaps you will at length tell me whither we are going: for as yet, you must recollect, I am in total ignorance of our place of destination.”

"Be satisfied, Rose," he answered, "with the certainty that you will enjoy yourself. I am about to conduct you to a splendid mansion, with charming grounds attached; and as it is fortunately a lovely June evening, the masques will not confine themselves to the heated saloons, but will rove about the gardens and shrubberies."

"It is a private ball, then?" I said, interrogatively.

"To be sure—a private one!" he exclaimed. "Did you for a moment think otherwise?"

"I did," was my answer: then after a brief pause, and with some little hesitation, I said, "But how, Gustavus, are you enabled to introduce me to a private mansion, without the risk of compromising yourself—perhaps also compromising me?"

"Make yourself easy, my dear Rose, on this head," he rejoined. "I was honoured with a card of invitation for two. Frankly speaking, I have no doubt it was a mistake on the part of whomsoever the card was written by, when it was worded for *Mr. and Mrs. Alwanky*: because the lady of the house—for she is a widow, and a somewhat antiquated one too—knows perfectly well that I am not married. It was therefore an error, no doubt occasioned by the hurry in issuing some thousand or twelve hundred invitations; and, as you perceive, I have profited by it to afford you this recreation.

"But, Gustavus," I interjected with some little degree of uneasiness, "suppose the error should be recollected when you present the card—"

"Banish all misgivings," he at once replied: "for you must of necessity comprehend that there is no announcement of each successive arrival's name: or else it

would destroy the *incognito* which the masqued costumes are intended for us to preserve—and the disguises would of course be unavailing."

"I understand," I said, now completely relieved. "It is to be a ball, then, on a very grand scale?"

"Such is the report," answered Gustavus. "Do not suffer yourself to be dazzled or bewildered by the brilliancy of the scene—appear quite at home—conduct yourself as if perfectly accustomed to such entertainments—and all will be well. No doubt you will have to dance—as I also must do; and therefore we may be separated for a considerable part of the evening."

In such conversation as this about half-an-hour was whiled away until the carriage drove into the grounds, in the midst of which stood the mansion that was our destination. A train of equipages, forming a long line, was passing in at one gate, setting down at the grand entrance, and passing out of another gate. What with the lamps of the carriages, of the gateways, and of the portico, as well as with the flood of lustre that glowed forth from the hall, the immense portals of which stood wide open, it was a perfect blaze of light. Every window too shone as if the interior of the dwelling itself were in a conflagration. Numerous domestics, in gorgeous liveries, were in attendance on the steps, the threshold, and within the hall; and the utmost order was preserved, as well as an extraordinary despatch exhibited, in the setting down of the company. Gustavus assisted me to alight: we passed into the hall, where a domestic in plain clothes—the only one so apparelled, and

therefore most probably the steward or butler—received the card which he presented. Only just glancing at it, the man dropped it into a basket behind him, and Mr. Alvanly led me towards the staircase, which was brilliantly lighted with lamps and artistically arranged with evergreens and flowers that formed an embowering avenue of verdure intermixed with floral beauties. A perfect tide of human beings—ladies and gentlemen, displaying every conceivable variety of costume, belonging to all climes and all ages—was pouring up this staircase, which was so wide as to allow if necessary, four persons to walk abreast with the greatest ease.

We reached a landing embellished with some exquisite pieces of sculpture—also decorated with evergreens and flowers; and on the opposite side of which from the staircase, the unfolded gilded portals afforded a view of an immense saloon. Into this sumptuously furnished apartment we proceeded; and on one side, near the entrance I beheld an elderly lady very thin and very ugly, but dressed in the most elegant manner—indeed, far too elegant for one of her years and withered appearance. She wore no mask—nor was it a fancy costume which she had on: and therefore I at once concluded that she was the mistress of the house. Besides, I observed that the guests as they entered, passed round by where she stood, and paid their respects to this lady. I however put the whispered question to Gustavus whether my conjecture was right, that she was the mistress of the mansion?

“Yes, Rose,” he answered. “Don’t start, now—don’t utter any ejaculation at what I am

going to say—That lady is the Marchioness of Sudbury.”

I was astonished: nay, more—astounded: for I had heard that the Marchioness of Sudbury was a sister of the Earl of Eveleigh. No doubt Gustavus felt that a sort of electric thrill swept through me as I leant upon his arm: for he quickly observed, “Be cautious, Rose. No emotion, I conjure you!”

I had no time to make any remark, nor put another question ere we stood in the presence of the Marchioness of Sudbury, and made our bows, which she very graciously acknowledged,—observing in language adapted to the occasion, “Welcome, gallant Sir Walter Raleigh: for your appearance tells me that you are that personification of chivalrous politeness whom I have named. And you too, Lady of Seville,” she added, now addressing herself to “welcome also. You come from your warm and Andalusian clime to brighten and embellish our colder and more northern region.

We bowed again, and passed on. The saloon led to other apartments, all flooded with lustre—all sumptuously furnished, and decorated with evergreens and garlands. There were vases, too, which exhaled a delicious perfume—not overpowering in its fragrance, but imparting a freshness to the atmosphere, which otherwise would have been too heated, notwithstanding the precautions judiciously taken to have the suite of rooms well ventilated. At the extremity of this suite there was a verandah, with which open casements communicated, and which looked upon the grounds at the back of the mansion. These grounds were lighted with myriads of variega-

ted lamps: and the scene presented a beautiful *coup d'ceil* when viewed from the verandah. At one end of this verandah, a flight of steps led down into the grounds: but as none of the guests had as yet descended thither, Gustavus conducted me back into the saloons, that we might observe the numerous fancy-dresses more at our leisure than we had hitherto done.

I have already said that these costumes were of infinite variety: I may now add that some were elegant and graceful, others ludicrous and grotesque—some picturesque, others quaint—some adopted for the purpose of pleasing, others for that of amusing. But it would be impossible, as it would likewise be tedious, to enter on anything like an elaborate description of the fancy-dresses: I must therefore pass over all details in this respect,—simply observing that notwithstanding the caution I have received in the carriage from Mr. Alvanly, I found myself so bewildered with delight—so astonished and dazzled, that if he had not led me along, I should have stood still to gaze in confused wonder and admiration upon the tide of masques now pouring through the rooms.

Presently a magnificent brass band struck up, sending its grand harmony swelling through the saloons, and adding to the exhilaration of the scene. One of the spacious apartments had the carpet taken up and the floor chalked for dancing. Preparations for the first quadrille were now being made: gentlemen were choosing their partners—which as a matter of course, they had to do according as the figure, costume, and general appearance of the ladies respectively struck their fancy: for there was no possibility of

judging by the countenances,—all present, with the single exception of the lady of the house, being masked or closely veiled. A gentleman, dressed in some rich fancy costume, came and solicited my hand: I accepted the offer; and separating from Mr. Alvanly, stood up with my partner in the dance. A few minutes afterwards I observed Gustavus place himself with a lady as our *vis-à-vis*; and the quadrille commenced. My partner—who, as far as I could judge, was a middle-aged man—was agreeable enough in his conversation, which, without an effort, he rendered of that sparkling and lively character which was fitted for the occasion. He of course made not the slightest attempt to discover who I was: nor did he drop a hint who he himself might be. When the quadrille was over, we promenaded two or three times round the room, with the others who had been dancing; and then he conducted me to a seat,—where I was almost immediately joined by Gustavus. I was about to ask him a certain question, when another masque came and invited me for the next quadrille;—and, to be brief, I danced four or five consecutively with different partners, until I felt both heated and weary. The rooms indeed had by this time become almost suffocating in their temperature, notwithstanding the precautions for ventilation, the fragrance of the flowers, and the perfume from the vases: so that the guests began to desert the saloons and descend into the grounds. Mr. Alvanly offered to conduct me thither; and as the rumour now circulated that there were to be fireworks, the whole company made for the open air.

As Alvanly was leading me towards the centre of the spacious

grounds, where the fireworks were to be let off from the interior of an elegantly fashioned Chinese pagoda hung with myriads of lamps,—I recollected the question which so many times for an hour past I had meant to put to him, but for which I had as yet found no opportunity.

"Tell me, Gustavus," I said, as we drew a little apart from the throng of masques pressing on towards the pagoda,—*"tell me, had you not some particular motive, beyond the bare thought of affording me pleasure, in bringing me hither?"*

"What motive could I have had, except the one you specify?"—and yet methought there was something in his accents which justified my suspicion.

"It seemed so singular," I responded, *"that you should have brought me to the house of the Earl of Eveleigh's sister."*

"It is a mere coincidence. The other day, when you were telling me about the antiquated Earl's overtures," continued Gustavus, *"I suddenly recollected that I had received the Marchioness or Sudbury's card of invitation; and therefore I thought I would bring you."*

"And do you suppose," I asked, *"that Lord Eveleigh and his family are here?"*

"My dear girl," exclaimed Alvanly *"how can I possibly answer the question? I have not sufficient penetration to see through all these disguises. This however I do know—that the Countess of Eveleigh and the rest of the family who were down in the country, came up to London a day or two back; and it might be in order to be present on this occasion. But what does it matter to you, Rose? No one can penetrate your*

disguise one whit more than we can penetrate the others."

I was not altogether satisfied by what Gustavus said; methought there was a certain assumed levity and artificial indifference in the tone of his observations; and the suspicion, that he really had some ulterior motive, lingered in my mind. I was about to question him farther, when there was a sudden explosion of fire-works, accompanied by a general rush towards the pagoda from the roof of which this grand pyrotechnic illumination burst forth. Hilarious gaiety—a wild delight—seemed to have taken possession of the hundreds thronging around. These grown-up people—many no doubt of mature years, and some evidently far advanced in age,—all appeared to have become children once more; but still above all, the tone and temper of good breeding and courteous propriety were universally apparent.

Volley after volley of fireworks went up: the effect was really splendid, as the combustibles burst in the air high overhead scattering about scintillations of all prismatic hues. Thus for a quarter of an hour the pyrotechnic exhibition was most satisfactory and entertaining—until a misadventure that might have been of a more serious character, occurred. A firework, instead of whirling straight up into the air to a considerable height, ascended but a short distance, and that obliquely—and then fell in the midst of the crowded assemblage. The effect produced was precisely as if a bomb-shell had suddenly fallen amongst the company: confusion and dismay prevailed—shrieks of terror burst forth from the ladies—cries and ejaculations of alarm from the

lips of the gentlemen; and simultaneously therewith, there was a general rush from the immediate point where the rocket had fallen. Upwards of a thousand persons were there gathered at the time; and the crowd bursting away from a central point, the entire mass was agitated, broken up, and flung into confusion as if in the eddies of a whirlpool. Numbers were thrown down—cries and shrieks redoubled: those on the outskirts hurried off in every direction—and as there was a tremendous rush in the very point where I and Gustavus were standing at the moment, we were separated—we were thrust asunder indeed as suddenly and as violently as if a troop of mad bulls had dashed between us.

I was seized with a panic terror; I fancied that flames would burst forth all around—that the ladies' dresses must be inevitably set in a blaze. I ran as if for my life. Tripping over the tendrils of some creeping plant that twined beyond the border of a parterre, I fell headlong. Three or four ladies who were close at my heels, fell likewise: it was a wild scramble—and when I sprang to my feet again, my veil and my mask had been torn off in the turmoil. I rushed madly on, the terror arising from the rocket having all in an instant yielded to one produced by another cause. I was unmasked—unveiled: my countenance was exposed—it was possible I might be recognised—and I remembered how urgent had been Mr. Alvanly's instructions that I should keep myself well disguised. Wildly I looked around: the company were still flying in every direction—for all that I have described was the work of but a few moments. Ah! what did I see before me upon the grass? A garment! It was a gray domino,

which had evidently either come off in the wild flight of its wearer, or else had been let loose in the dread that the combustibles might overtake it. I seized upon this domino: it was of elegant fashion, richly embroidered: and without pausing for an instant to reflect on the propriety or impropriety of self-appropriating it, I put it on. Indeed a single instant was sufficient for me to envelop myself therewith. The hood was drawn over my countenance: I was once more effectually disguised.

Now I stopped short and looked around in search of Alvanly. At that moment a masque, wearing the costume of a King's Page in the time of Henry VIII, accosted me, and said in a hurried manner, "This way, Lucia—this way!"

Good heavens, it was the voice of Horace Rockingham! I recognised it at once. Astonishment riveted me to the spot; and between the slight opening which I had left in the hood did I survey him. His costume was rich and elegant—admirably becoming his slight, short, symmetrical figure; and a black silk mask completely covered his countenance.

"Come, Lucia—come, I say!" he again whispered in a hurried and excited manner, as he doubtless fancied that I hesitated. "Now is the opportunity to converse for a moment; while all is in confusion!"

I regained my self-possession an instant. I saw that I was taken for Lady Lucia Calthorpe: it was evident that there was some appointment, or at least some kind of understanding betwixt Horace Rockingham and Lord Eveleigh's daughter: perhaps everything was not really broken off between them? At all

events I was resolved to know, if possible.

"Come!" he said: and snatching at my hand he hurried me along with him away from the vicinity of the pagoda.

We plunged into an avenue where the variegated lamps were only suspended around the entrance: and a few moments brought us into the almost complete obscurity caused by the over-arching trees. There was a seat at a short distance down this avenue: and thither Horace led me, placing himself by my side.

"I thought I should never get an opportunity to speak to you," he at once went on to say, with the same rapid utterance as before. "Your father seemed determined to keep to himself, just for all the world as if he suspected that you had arranged to meet me here. I did not get your letter and the invitation-card in time yesterday to send you an answer by the messenger who brought them: but of course you felt sure that I should come. You did well to send me a blank card: and I filled it up with the name of Smith. I made sure that out of such an immense concourse there must be several Smiths and that it was therefore the safest one to adopt. But to the point, Lucia! I never saw such a letter in my life as you wrote me: it was half bitterness, half plain-tiveness. You say that you can't possibly conceal your situation much longer—that you are afraid your maid already suspects it—and that I must marry you at once. But my dear girl—Why don't you speak?"

Horace stopped short—and paused for a few moments, evidently waiting for an answer. Though astounded at the revelation which had just fallen upon my ears, I

was nevertheless sufficiently collected to be aware that some part must be played in order to sustain his belief that it was really Lady Lucia Calthorpe whom, he was addressing. What better could I do—or what would seem more natural under the circumstances—than to sob and weep? I accordingly presented to do both.

"Well, well, Lucia," continued Horace, "I have no doubt you feel somewhat unhappy; and I am really sorry for it. You knew very well I meant to marry you at the time—and would have done so if your father had not broken it off. But things are rather altered now; and though what I am going to tell you is of course a profound secret, yet I must reveal it to you, so as to convince you that I am not trying to shuffle unhand-somely out of an engagement. The fact is, Lucia, my father has just sustained such a tremendous loss by an unlucky speculation into which he was foolish enough to enter, that it is ten to one he will be totally ruined in a few weeks. Nothing but a miracle can save him. He confessed this to me with tears in his eyes yesterday morning; and depend upon it, it must be a very serious thing indeed that could bring tears into his eyes. So now, Lucia, you know the truth. Of course you will keep it to yourself: indeed, you can have no interest in mentioning it; and your own good sense will show you that it would be utter madness for me to do as you ask and run away with you. I could not keep a wife: perhaps in a short time I sha'n't be able to keep myself. You must manage for the best. Make a confidante of your mother—or else of your aunt, old Lady Sudbury; and the affair will be hushed up. You can go

into the country or on the continent; and if the child lives—But persons are coming! You go back that way—I will hasten off in this direction.”

With these words he darted away, like an arrow shot from a bow, farther along the avenue, and was in a moment lost in the obscurity: while I advanced towards the illuminated entrance—and passing by a group of masques who were entering the shady walk, and whose voices had met our ears, I emerged forth again upon the brilliantly lighted grounds. I had not a minute’s leisure to reflect upon the astounding revelations I had learnt from Horace Rockingham’s lips, ere I beheld Mr. Alvanly hastening about with my veil and mask in his hands, searching for me in every direction.

“Here I am, Gustavus!” I said, quickly accosting him.

“You, Rose?” he ejaculated, in amazement. “But whence that domino?”

“I lost these things,” I answered, pointing to what he carried in his hands, “in the confusion of the flight. I was bewildered and terrified at finding myself suddenly stripped of my disguise—this one lay in my path—I snatched it up—put it on—and have been looking for you ever since;”—for I did not choose to mention a single syllable in reference to the startling adventure I had just experienced with Horace Rockingham.

“Well, Rose,” he observed, laughing heartily at my explanations, “you did wisely in one sense: but this assumption of a garb not your own might have led to singular, complications—particularly” he added, in a gay jesting manner, “if that gray domino had been specially worn for an appoint-

ment of love. However, come amongst these trees, and make the requisite change.”

This was soon done. Fortunately my veil was not torn—only a little soiled; and I was once more apparelled as a lady of Seville.

“But what shall we do with the domino?” I asked.

“Leave it where you found it,” he replied, flinging it upon the grass: and fortunately no one observed the proceeding. I now took his arm; and he led me again towards the pagoda where a considerable portion of the company had re-assembled, the remainder having returned to the saloons; for they had no doubt seen quite enough of the fireworks. I learnt from Alvanly that no accident had arisen from the mis-adventure—and that the alarm was the most serious result of it. It was promptly announced by the pyrotechnist that there would be no farther display; and the throng dispersing into small parties, spread over the grounds. Mr. Alvandy and I sauntered along: but it soon occurred to me that he was searching for some one in particular. That the object of his curiosity was of the male sex, I likewise felt assured: for every time a masked gentleman drew near, he studied him with attention.

“You are looking for some one, Gustavus?” I said.

“To confess the truth, I am,” was his response.

“Who may it be?” I asked.

“You shall see in a few minutes,” he rejoined.

“But how can you hope to discover any particular person, disguised as he is sure to be? I thought you said just now,” I continued, “that it was impossible to penetrate these costumes.”

“As a general rule, no doubt,” answered Gustavus: “but the indi-

vidual for whom I am looking, is of such a figure that he cannot so far disguise himself as to escape my power of penetration. Ah! there he is. Now, Rose, take your cue from me—or be silent altogether, if you will—and I promise you a rare piece of sport.

While Mr Alvanly was giving utterance to these last words, my attention was riveted upon the individual whom he had singled out, and whom he was evidently on the point of accosting. This individual was alone—but appeared to be searching for some one. He was apparelled to represent Voltaire: and his figure—spare, lank, and bowed—was admirably adapted for the personification of the celebrated French philosopher when in his old age, and as all his portraits represent him. The gentleman who had thus chosen him for his prototype, wore a powdered wig—carried his three-cornered hat under his arm—walked with a stick—had the short but wide-skirted coat worn in those times when Voltaire lived—the knee-breeches—the shoes with high heels and buckles, I need scarcely add that his countenance was concealed with a mask.

As I contemplated this figure, a suspicion crept into my mind: the longer I surveyed him, the more the idea was strengthened; and as Alvanly led me nearer, it deepened into the conviction that the personifier of Voltaire could be none other than the Earl of Eveleigh. Ah! then he was searching for his daughter Lucia, from whom he had no doubt been separated in the same confused turmoil which had led to my own recent adventure?

"Greatest and wittiest of all philosophers," said Gustavus, disguising his voice as we approached the Earl, "for whom are you seek-

ing? Had not you a lantern like that Greek sage who may be regarded as one of your ancestors in the schools of learning, I should think you were searching for an honest man. But in the midst of this blaze of beauty, it is more probable—wicked philosopher that thou art!—it is for a fairer and softer being whom you are thus anxiously looking."

"You are not altogether wrong, gallant Sir Walter Raleigh," was the response given; and though there was an attempt on the part of the Earl to disguise his voice, yet it was scarcely difficult to identify it was that nobleman's. "Yes," he continued. "I am in search of a fair creature: but she happens to be my daughter."

"Then, most sage philosopher," rejoined Alvanly, "you have brought your daughter hither to be a guarantee of your steadiness on this particular occasion: for well assured am I that such is not your general character."

"What! is Voltaire to be malign-ed?" exclaimed the Earl, affecting indignation.

"Not malign-ed," answered Gustavus: "for malignity means untruthful scandal—whereas your amorous gaiety and gallantry, though at so advanced an age, are becoming notorious. Why, it is not long ago that you were sighing, most sage philosopher, at the feet of a rare beauty. Bidding your Encyclopædias and Dictionaries, go to the devil, you were making proposals of the most love-lorn character not a hundred miles from Jermyn Street!"

I pressed Alvanly's arm forcibly, to intimate that I disliked this bantering of the old Earl; and I noticed that Eveleigh himself was looking uneasily through the eye-lets of his mask, first at Gustavus—then at me—then back

again at Gustavus. He doubtless knew not precisely what to think of my companion's observation,—whether they were mere random shots thrown out in good humour—bantering—or whether they had a special significance.

"Ah, most sage philosopher!" continued Gustavus, "you who have so unmercifully ridiculed the follies of the world—you who have so playfully satirized the forbles of the human race—should be the very last to yield to those weaknesses which you evidently comprehend so well and affect to despise so much. What! the sage Voltaire throwing himself at the feet of beauty—offering her equipages, a mansion, a train of domestics, an income of thousands a year—"

"I—I—don't understand—you must be mistaken—you are talking of things I know nothing about:"—and the poor Earl trembled visibly from head to foot, so that never was Voltaire typified by any being so craven and so ignominious. As for myself, I was much annoyed at Alvanly's proceedings. I pitied the old man: I could not forget the zeal with which he had executed my commission in respect to Arthur Brydges; and I thought that Gustavus was too hard upon him.

"Now, M. de Voltaire," he continued, "take the advice of Sir Walter Raleigh—who, though not wise enough to keep his own head upon his shoulders—may nevertheless be able to afford a lesson even to the sage and erudite philosopher. Depend upon it, they are not likely to fall in love with your antiquated countenance—they only laugh and ridicule you behind your back—"

Here I pressed Alvanly's arm so hard that methought the poor Earl observed the movement. He

again looked very hard at me: he still trembled from head to foot: he was no doubt painfully humiliated deeply—mortified. Alvanly maintained his ground: he would not yield to my significant intimations that I wished him to put an end to this discourse. But an incident which now occurred, had the effect of so doing. For all of a sudden, a lady, clad in the gray domino which I had ere now worn, and which she had therefore evidently succeeded in recovering, came up to the spot where this scene was going on; and taking the Earl's arm, murmured in accents which indicated mingled exhaustion and terror. "Oh where have you been, father? I have searched for you everywhere!"

"And I also for you," responded the old nobleman: and, no doubt infinitely rejoiced to be thus relieved of farther bantering on the part of Alvanly, he hurried away with his daughter.

"Now, Gustavus, I understand," I said, coldly and distantly, wherefore you brought me hither. It was not for the mere purpose of affording me recreation. You had another object in view—and it was twofold. In the first place, you wish to punish the Earl for having dared make overtures to me; and in the second place you sought to create such a breach between his lordship and myself, as to render it utterly out of the question that he will ever renew those overtures. Your first motive has made you guilty of conduct that is unhandsome towards me, in as much as you should have consulted me with regard to your intention, and not have brought me hitherto serve as a blind agent or tool in the matter. Your second motive proves that you had no real faith in my constancy towards yourself; in your heart you

dreaded lest I should be dazzled by lord Eveleigh's overtures, and you have taken the present means to make him my mortal enemy. Ah! Gustavus, all this is but little complimentary to me—and but little honourable to yourself! Of course you intended the poor old man to suspect that it was I myself who was listening to the language in which you addressed him: he will think that I have not merely betrayed that which ought to have been regarded as secret—but that I have likewise voluntarily sought to become the witness of his humiliation.”

“Why, Rosel” cried Alvanly, “is it possible you are offended? I have been listening in downright astonishment at this elaborate piece of reasoning on your part. As a matter of course I chose to punish the old fellow for seeking to deprive me of a mistress whom I love. Understand me well, Rosel! If he had been a young man, I should have called him out; but an old dotared like that, with one foot in the grave—it would have been downright murder. Therefore, I was compelled to adopt this course. Are you any longer angry?”

“I am not well pleased,” was my response, coldly given. “And now, with your permission, I will return home. I have had enough of the masque ball to which I was brought for a purpose of your own, and not for my recreation.”

“My dear Rose, pray don't be offended,” urged Alvanly. As for not having faith in you—”

“The less that is said upon the subject, the better,” I interrupted him: and as we now reached the steps leading up to the verandah, on which several masques were grouped in hilarious conversation, the topic of our discourse could not be continued.

“But you will not persist in returning home yet, Rose?” said Mr. Alvanly, as we entered the saloons. “It is by no means late: indeed, it is still quite early—and I do not think the carriage will have come yet. Pray get into good humour again! Have another dance—I will likewise—and let us endeavour to pass at least one hour agreeably.”

While he was yet speaking, a thought entered my head; and in pursuance thereof I ascended to his proposal. Dancing was speedily resumed: a gentleman came and invited me for the quadrille: Gustavus chose a partner for himself; and thus another half-hour was spent. The quadrille being over, and the usual promenade round the room being likewise finished, my partner conducted me to a seat—made his bow—and left me. I glanced quickly around: Mr. Alvanly was not at the moment to be seen—he had entered the adjoining room with his own partner—and this circumstance afforded me the very opportunity which I desired. I sped forth upon the verandah—descended the steps—and emerged once more upon the grounds.

I will now explain the thought which had suddenly struck me when Gustavus was proposing that we should remain a little longer. It had occurred to me that Lady Lucia Calthorpe would be certain to seek some opportunity of saying a few words to Horace Rockingham; and if so, I was desirous to watch them and overhear, if possible, whatsoever might take place. After my return with Alvanly to the brilliantly lighted apartments, I had looked in vain amongst the throng of masques for the old Earl in the Voltaire garb—for Lady Lucia in

the gray domino—and for Horace Rockingham in the Page's dress. I felt tolerably sure that the father and daughter on their side and Horace on his own part, had remained in the grounds; and I knew full well that if Lucia should perceive Horace, her ingenuity would by some means or another enable her to separate from her father for the purpose of having an interview with her lover—whom I had likewise found to be her seducer.

These were the reflections which I had made, and which now prompted me to quit the saloons once more and go forth into the open air. Aided by my dark apparel, I could glide unperceived amongst shady avenues—behind groups of trees—or even hover at a distance from the centres of light, and observe whatsoever was going on. There were not many masques now walking about in the grounds: there was consequently no confusion of costumes and personages to perplex my view as I looked in every direction for the objects of my search. Presently I beheld Lord Eveleigh in his Voltaire garb hastening towards the steps of the verandah: he was alone—and every instant he kept looking around, evidently for some one. I felt assured that Lucia had again become separated from him; and if so, it must be this time of her own accord, as there were no circumstances of alarm nor turmoil to sever them. I made a rapid circuit of all that part of the grounds in the midst of which the lights were festooning in all manners of devices; and just as I reached the vicinage of that very avenue into which Horace Rockingham had ere now led me, I beheld two figures, disappearing rapidly in the darkness that lay beyond the lights

burning at the entrance. But that glimpse was sufficient to show me the well-known gray domino worn by Lucia, and the slight elegant figure of Horace Rockingham apparelled as a Page of Henry VIII's reign.

My black dress, as I have already stated, enabled me to glide unperceived, as a spirit of darkness amongst the trees; and my foot steps were noiseless as those of the sprite itself. The half-hushed but nevertheless excited sounds of voices quickly guided me to a particular spot, and I soon became aware that this must be where that very same bench was situated on which I had ere now sat by the side of Horace Rockingham.

"What do you tell me" were the first hurried and excited words which distinctly met my ears, as I stopped short to listen the discourse that was going on: and it was a female voice that spoke. "What strange thing is this you are saying, Horace? Are you beside yourself? or am I myself frenzied, that I do not understand you?"

"Why, you must be frenzied," was young Rockingham's quick and somewhat brutal response.

"Good heavens! what does he mean?" exclaimed Lucia, though still in an undertone. "You have spoken to me before this night, you say?"

"Certainly," answered Horace: "here—upon this very seat—But I remember that you were crying and would not speak a word yourself. What airs are these that you are putting on?"

"Airs?" echoed the unfortunate young lady: and there was the wildest despair in her accents. "Tell me once again. Horace what you ere now said, that I may see if I can comprehend you!"

"This is almost too much!" cried Rockingham impetuously: "but if you will make me recapitulate, be it so. I tell you, then, that scarcely an hour has elapsed since you and I were seated here together. Of course I knew you by the gray domino, which you told me in your letter you should wear; and you likewise knew me, as you enjoined me in that self-same letter to come in this very costume which I have adopted."

"Horace," murmured Lucia, in almost a dying voice, "there is some frightful error in all this! Speak, for heaven's sake! Tell me—was it immediately after the alarm, and panic in front of the pagoda—"

"It was," rejoined Rockingham, quickly, and in a tone which began to testify bewilderment, if not positive alarm. "An error, you say? Impossible! there is not another masque present wearing a gray domino embroidered like yours."

"O heavens, what will become of me? what shall I do?" exclaimed Lucia, in an agony of grief. "I lost my domino—some one must have self-appropriated it. It was not I, Horace, whom you conducted hither! Tell me, tell me—did you say anything that could betray me? did you address me by name?"

"I think I must have called you Lucia," he responded,—"but that is all. And you are not, you know, the only Lucia in the world. Ah! but I remember—"

"What—what do you remember?" demanded the young lady, with feverish, frenzied excitement.

"I remember that I spoke of your aunt, naming her as Lady Sudbury: and therefore—"

"Heavens! identifying me beyond all possibility of doubt

Horace, Horace it is not sufficient that you ruined my honour by the foulest treachery—by violence—by force—but now, by your wilful, wanton recklessness, you have compromised me beyond the possibility of redemption!"—and the unfortunate young lady burst into the most anguished weeping.

"Come, come, Lucia—if you mean to reproach me in this way," said Horace, with the most hard-hearted callousness, "the sooner our interview ends the better. How the deuce could I suspect that another had put on your domino?"

"No, no—you could not!" murmured the afflicted Lucia. "It was doubtless the jest of some masque—but that jest has put the one who played it in possession of a secret which is death to me! Oh, be not angry with me—treat me not with indifference! More than ever do I require your love! I am at your mercy! Horace, I am already your wife in the sight of heaven: let me at once become so in that of the world. Need I recapitulate all that I said in my letter? Tell me, dearest Horace—tell me that tomorrow you will make all the atonement which lies in your power! Where shall I meet you? I will contrive to steal forth—"

"Listen, Lucia," interrupted Rockingham; "for I see that I must repeat to you what I said to that other whom I just now took to be you. I am sorry, Lucia—but it is impossible."

"Impossible?" she echoed, wildly. "No, no—speak not that word—it will be my death!"

"Calm yourself every moment is precious," rejoined Rockingham: "your father will be looking for you. Listen—and interrupt me not. Or rather, answer me a

question—Would you wed a beggar?

"Oh! this is cruel—too cruel, Horace!" murmured the afflicted young lady. "It is a subterfuge—Great God! to think that you should have reduced me to this, and now seek to abandon me! Oh, it is too cruel!"—and low but bitter means escaped Lucia's lips.

"It is no subterfuge—Would to heaven that it were!" ejaculated Horace: "because *then* I should not be the ruined being that I am!"

"You ruined?" murmured Lucia: and her very accents showed that she was shivering and trembling all over in the anguish of her affliction.

"My father is a ruined man, Lucia," answered Horace; "and you know that I am totally dependent on him. Ah! think you not that this truth is painful enough for me to speak? but it is one that must be told! And now I again ask—will you wed a beggar?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Lucia, almost frantic. "I must have a father's name for the child that I bear in my bosom!"

"This is ridiculous, Lucia" said Horace, impatiently. "Poverty will be bad enough for one—but intolerable for two—and utter madness to be wilfully sought by three. Do not buoy yourself up with any silly hope. Your father has no money to give you: all his estates are entailed on your eldest brother—and the Earl himself lives beyond his income, and spends thousands on his own pleasures. Besides, he hates me—and would cast you off if you became my wife."

There was a fresh burst of anguish on Lady Lucia Calthorpe's part:—from her lips came forth lamentations which cut me to the very soul, as they fell upon

my ears: but the heartless monster Rockingham scarcely spoke a word, or bestowed a caress upon his victim, to calm and console her.

"Horace," she suddenly said, "hear me, hear me, for the last time! I am at your mercy: but whatever your fortunes may be—whether prosperous or ruined—I demand of you the only reparation which you have it in your power to make for the monstrous wrong you perpetrated against me. If, when we were on that visit to your father's house in Cheshire, I had surrendered myself to you in a moment of weakness, you might perhaps deem me a wanton—and you might hesitate to make me your wife. But you know that it was far otherwise. Good heavens! is it necessary that I should remind you that you acted the part of the ravisher—that you came to my chamber by night—and that you forcibly deprived me of my honour! O Horace! surely, surely" cried Lucia in accents of despair, "you will not add the crowning outrage to that wrong which was in itself so foul? you will not abandon me after having made me your victim?"

"And yet, Lucia—methinks," replied Horace, in a tone of ironical reproach, "you could not have pleaded very hard with your father, when some four or five months back he took it into his head to break off the match— forbid me the house—deny himself with characteristic patrician hauteur to my father, when he called to ask for explanations and see whether the misunderstanding could not be compromised."

"Horace," responded Lucia, in an imploring voice which would have touched any heart save that of the fiend-like young man—"I

was indignant as well as cruelly afflicted at the intelligence that you had sought the love of a degraded female—a lost and abandoned woman—at the very time that you were my affianced husband. I did not then know, Horace," she continued, in a still softer and more plaintive voice, "that I was destined to become a mother: and therefore perhaps I suffered my anger at the time to predominate over a sense of the necessity for repairing my ruined honour. But afterwards, when the conviction dawned in upon my soul that I bore in my bosom the evidence of that which was no weakness on my part, but an outrage on yours—"

"Ah, I comprehend!" ejaculated Rockingham, sarcastically: "you then thought you had better pretend to love me once more. Now listen once for all Lucia! I cannot marry you—I dare not, with ruin staring me in the face."

For a few moments there was a succession of quick convulsing sobs from Lady Lucia's throat: but all of a sudden they ceased—and she said in a cold firm voice, but which was only thus collected in the utter despair which filled her soul, "Enough, sir! No longer will I address you as a suppliant. God only knows what I shall do, or what will become of me: but there is one last favour which I implore you to grant—and this is that you will keep my secret as inviolable as if your own honour, and not mine only, depended upon it."

"Oh! as for that," exclaimed Rockingham, in a voice which showed that he experienced a sense of relief amounting almost to exultation at having reached the end of what, even for *his* vilely callous heart, could scarcely have been a very pleasant inter-

view—"as for that, Lucia, I promise you sacredly and solemnly. And now we must separate. Farewell."

"Farewell, sir," rejoined the young lady, still in the calm glacial voice of despair.

I now heard their footsteps: departing in different directions and I could judge that Horace was hastening farther along the avenue, as he had ere now done after his interview with me—while Lucia was about to emerge forth by the entrance where the variegated lamps were suspended. An idea had stolen into my brain: for I felt a boundless compassion for that much injured and deeply outraged young lady—a compassion which was scarcely checked in its purpose by the manner in which she had alluded to myself. Nevertheless those expressions so keenly cutting, so fearfully galling, so terribly humiliating—"degraded female," "lost and abandoned woman"—still rang in my ears; and I hesitated to carry out the design which had previously suggested itself. But no: I would not be ungenerous—I would not be unforgiving. It was possible that I might assist a fellow-creature in the extremity of her bitterest need: at all events I had it in my power to relieve her mind in a moment from the frightful apprehension under which it was labouring in respect to the revelation of her secret to the masque who had temporarily adopted her gray domino.

I emerged from the place of my own concealment: I hurried along the outskirts of the avenue of trees. I overtook Lady Lucia just as she was entering again upon the sphere of light. She was moving rapidly onward, no doubt anxious to rejoin her father, from whom she must have con-

trived on some pretext to separate herself; and doubtless also the brain was racked by the most excruciating and agonizing reflections. Oh! once more was illimitable compassion dominant in my mind; and I forgot the terribly injurious epithets she had applied unto me.

"Pardon me," I said, suddenly presenting myself before her; "I have one word to breathe in your ears."

She started—and then stopped short: and doubtless through the slight opening in the hood of her domino, she surveyed me with attention; for that she quickly recognised me—or rather my costume was immediately evidenced.

"Who are you?" she inquired, in a voice of breathless excitement. "I saw you just now with a gentleman—Ah! I recollect—he was dressed as Sir Walter Raleigh—and you were both speaking to my father."

"No matter who I am," I responded. "I know you—and I purpose to befriend you."

"Befriend me?" echoed her ladyship, the very announcement itself naturally seeming to her in the light of an avowal that her secret was known to me.

"Yes—befriend you," I emphatically rejoined. "Fear nothing: your secret is safe. It was I who ere now assumed your dress."

"Good heavens!" murmured Lady Lucia, evidently bewildered by all that she heard, as well as by her own distracting thoughts.

"Fear nothing," I repeat: "your secret is safe."

"But who are you?" she cried: "for God's sake, tell me who you are!"

"Not now—not now," was my quick response. "Give me an appointment—Or stay!" I ejaculated. "The day after to-morrow

—at three o'clock precisely—I will walk alone, near the bridge over the Serpentine, in Hyde Park. Can you come?"

"Yes, yes," answered Lady Lucia, still in a state of feverish suspense. "But how shall I know you? how will you know me?"

"Look!" I answered: and throwing back my veil, I removed my mask. "You will recollect this countenance?"

Yes—it is beautiful—and its expression is kind," murmured Lord Eveleigh's daughter, evidently experiencing some relief from my behaviour towards her.

"And now farewell for the present," I said, quickly replacing my mask and re-adjusting my veil. "The day after to-morrow—at three o'clock—near the bridge of the Serpentine."

I then hurried away—tripped lightly along—gained the steps leading to the verandah—and on ascending to the verandah itself, which chanced at the instant to be unoccupied, lingered there for a few moments to calm my thoughts which had been thrown into a state of excitement by the scenes which I have just described. I was about to re-enter the saloons, when Mr. Alvanly suddenly came forth upon the verandah; and perceiving me, he said, "I was just looking for you. I hope you have amused yourself. Have you been dancing again? I have been in the reception-room for the last half-hour, exchanging witticisms and repartees with a tribe of young fellows, who did their best to make me out—but they could not. I hope you have not missed me, dear Rose—and that you have found an agreeable succession of partners for the dance?"

"Thank you," I responded; "I have been sufficiently well entertained—"

"What!—still cool? still offended with me?" interrupted Alvanly, in a deprecating tone. "I did not think that you would cherish ill-humour like this."

"And I should think very little of myself," was my rejoinder, "if I were to tell you all in an instant that I have ceased to recollect your conduct of this evening. I may forgive it—but it is impossible to forget it readily. And now, with your permission, I will return home. It is getting late—and no doubt the carriage has come.—"

"If you wish it, we will depart," said Gustavus. "But in an hour or so there will be supper and a general unmasking—"

"You know very well," I interrupted him, "that I cannot incur the risk of being recognised; and you surely have not forgotten how strict were your injunctions that I should keep myself thoroughly disguised."

"True, Rose—during all the early part of the evening; but just at the fag-end, when every one will be intent upon taking refreshments—Besides, you know we can keep much apart as we chose from the bulk of the company."

"No Gustavus," I answered, resolutely, "I will neither stand the chance of compromising you, nor of seeking humiliation for myself. Remain if you choose: but suffer me to depart."

"Then I will go with you," he said, "since you are determined."

Having made our bows to the Marchioness of Sudbury, we entered the carriage and returned to London. During the drive Gustavus did all he could to coax and cajole me back into good-humour: I suffered myself to unbend somewhat; but still in my heart I felt profoundly annoyed with him—for I could not help thinking that I had been badly

treated, and indeed that his conduct had amounted sufficiently near to an actual outrage to be deserving of resentment.

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTAIN FORTESCUE.

MR. ALVANY remained with me until after breakfast in the morning; and when he had taken his departure, I fell into a train of reflections upon the incidents of the previous evening. What revelations had met my ears! what things had come to my knowledge! It was but too evident that the unfortunate Lady Lucia Calthorpe had been subjected to the most atrocious outrage which one of her sex could possibly experience on the part of man—that her honour had been sacrificed to the fierce lust of the unprincipled violator! I remembered that on the memorable occasion when I had inveigled Horace Rockingham to my lodgings, and the Earl of Eveleigh was concealed in the adjacent room, the fiend-like young man had described Lucia as a cold inanimate image. But was this because she had not voluntarily surrendered herself to his desires, and that he had found himself forced to employ violence in order to achieve his diabolical triumph? I could scarcely believe she was a cold inanimate image: on the contrary, it appeared to me that she possessed sensitive feelings;—or at least the pathetic and passionate appeals she had made to him on the preceding night in the dark avenue, appeared to warrant that estimate of her character. But if there were any doubt as to the precise nature of unfortunate

young lady's disposition, there was assuredly none in respect to that of her heartless ravisher. Though the hot blood of fiercest desires boiled in his veins, yet was it cold as ice as the fountains of the heart. Implacable and pitiless as the Enemy of Mankind himself, was Horace Rockingham! Intensely selfish—the most thorough egotist that ever the world contained—it was evident that he sought only the gratification of his own desires, without the slightest regard for his victims. As it was with me, so was it with Lucia Calthorpe: no sense of honour could move the petrified heart nor influence the callous soul of that fiend in an angel's shape!

Yes—heartless indeed was Horace Rockingham! Full well could I judge the extent of his cold callous indifference towards Lady Lucia, when seated together upon the bench, by the conduct he had observed towards myself about an hour previously, and when under the belief that in me he was addressing the Earl's daughter. For not once during that interview with me did he proffer the slightest caress—not once did he so much as modulate his voice to the depth of a soothing tenderness. His behaviour was that of a man who, having gratified his passion recked no longer for its object. That he was thus utterly unconcerned so far as regarded Lady Lucia, was but too evident: she had even ceased to inspire him with those desires which he had gratified by violence. But was not retribution overtaking this unprincipled young man?—unless indeed the tale which he had told of his father's imminent ruin were all a mere fable, devised as a subterfuge and a pretext for crown-

ing his detestable conduct towards Lady Lucia, and following up the accomplishment of her dishonour by eventual abandonment. Yet no. As I calmly reasoned upon this point, I thought to myself that Horace Rockingham was not the person who would travel out of his way to invent an excuse for refusing to make atonement where wrong was inflicted. It was all very well if facts themselves supplied such a pretext: it was then natural that he should avail himself of it—because no man, not even the very worst, omits an opportunity of justifying a bad action when circumstances seem to afford a ready salve for his conscience. But Horace would sooner have brazened the matter out with the boldest hardihood, than have beaten about the bush for such an apology as that which he offered;—and therefore I came to the conclusion that it was a true one. Oh! how my heart rejoiced, and what a gloating pleasure did I experience, at the thought that this unscrupulous young miscreant might in a short time be reduced to distress!—and I said to myself that if he endeavoured to patch up his fallen fortunes by a matrimonial alliance, and by the beauty of his person captivate the heart of some heiress more lovesick than prudent, I would watch all his proceedings, and I would do my best to mar their ultimate triumph.

But to resume the thread of my narrative. Mr. Alvanly, on taking his departure after breakfast, had informed me that it was possible he might not be able to come and dine with me in the evening, as he had some business demanding his attention; but that he should certainly arrive at dessert-time, so that in a glass of champagne

together our little differences might be cleared up. Of this however I was by no means so sure. His conduct towards me rankled in my breast. He had given way to jealousy when all the time I was innocent and though perhaps there had been some little grounds, inasmuch as I had concealed from him those very visits which had excited the feeling,—still I was vexed and piqued that when everything was cleared up, he had not put faith in my constancy, but had taken a vast deal of trouble to create an irreparable breach between myself and Lord Eveleigh. I dwelt with a growing inveteracy upon every detail of my protector's conduct; and I remembered the foul treachery with which, by means of drugged wine and the aid of an unprincipled woman, he had betrayed me on my first arrival in London. I thought to myself that if I had never thus become the victim of his black perfidiousness, I might have pursued a virtuous career,—eating the bread of honest industry, but far more contented and happy in a humble grade than I now was, though surrounded by all the elegances and luxuries of life. The longer I continued this train of reflection, the more embittered did I become against Alvanly; and then, by a transition which was not at the moment altogether intelligible to myself, I found my thoughts settling upon the image of the handsome and agreeable Reginald Fortescue.

While the fascinating Captain of the Life Guards was thus occupying my mind, the housemaid brought me in a note, the contents of which ran as follow :—

"June 14th, 1841."

"Captain Fortescue presents his most respectful compliments to Miss Lambert, and will do himself the honour of calling on Miss Lambert between four and five o'clock this evening. Captain Fortescue has taken the liberty of making this written announcement inasmuch as he has transmitted several verbal requests to Miss Lambert, soliciting a few moments' interview; and to each one he has received an unfavourable response. Esteeming Miss Lambert too highly to feel the endurance of her displeasure any longer tolerable, Captain Fortescue has at length adopted these means of seeking an opportunity for such self-exculpation or explanation as under circumstances may be requisite."

I should inform the reader that ever since the night of the burglary I had not once seen Captain Fortescue. It will be remembered that on the following morning he had requested permission, through Mrs. Harborough, to pay his respects to me, but that I had declined to see him. A fortnight and upwards had since elapsed: but I had never received one of those messages to which he alluded in his note so that I had not the slightest doubt they had been intercepted by Mrs. Harborough herself, who doubtless had her own good reasons for creating a coolness between me and the Captain. The arrival of this letter at the very instant his image was uppermost in my thoughts, struck me as a curious coincidence. I experienced strange sensations; and seriously set myself to deliberate whether I really loved Captain Fortescue or not. I presently found myself thinking that I would sooner inhabit a cottage with him and live on the

humblest fare, than continue to dwell in these handsome apartments under the protection of Gustavus Alvanly. I now therefore more than half suspected that Reginald Fortescue was not altogether indifferent to me: I remembered how jealous I had felt in respect to Mrs. Harborough when I had obtained the conviction of his intimacy with her; and I at length murmured to myself, "Yes—this must be love; and I do love Reginald Fortescue!"

Still I hesitated somewhat to afford him the interview which he sought. What exculpations or explanations could he have to give unless for a specific purpose? and what specific purpose could he have in view, if not the formal making of those overtures which, at the commencement of our acquaintance a few months back, he had endeavoured to convey by pressures of the hand and tender glances. But was I prepared to break off with Gustavus Alvanly and throw myself into the arms of Reginald Fortescue? I knew not: I grew bewildered in my reflections: I felt my heart fluttering, and my soul filled with an anxious uneasy suspense. But very certain it was that the longer a comparison between those two was forced upon my mind the less favourable did it prove to Gustavus Alvanly, and the more favourable to Reginald Fortescue.

I did not go out that afternoon either for a drive or a walk: I was not only wearied with the excitement of the previous evening's scenes, but also occupied with the varied reflections which I have been recording. Between three and four o'clock I ascended to my dressing-room to perform the evening toilet; and when Frances consulted me as to the apparel I

chose to wear, I caught myself mentioning that which I fancied became me most. Was it because Reginald Fortescue was coming to see me presently? The question which thus suddenly flashed to my mind called up a blush to my cheeks.

Shortly after four o'clock I was seated on the sofa in the drawing-room, elegantly dressed in evening costume. The low corsage displayed a sufficiency of my bust to set off its really fine contours, without however a meretricious immodesty: my bare arms, as they were reflected in the mirror opposite, were of dazzling whiteness—sufficiently robust for healthy plumpness and to be consistent with their sculptural modelling. I wore my hair in tresses: the flutter of my heart heightened the colour upon my cheeks; and altogether methought that I had never seemed more beautiful. Was I vain of this loveliness on its own account alone? or was I proud of it as a means of fascinating a heart which I in reality longed to ensnare? In a word, was I deeply in love with Reginald Fortescue? had the reflections of this day impressed that conviction upon my mind? and was I looking forward with pleasure to the moment when his footsteps should be heard upon the stairs?

Not long did I wait ere those sounds met my ears: one of the domestics opened the door—and Captain Fortescue was announced. I rose to receive him: I endeavoured to look calm and collected, as if I suspected nothing—much less that he meant anything beyond the ordinary courtesies of a visit;—and that very effort to banish confusion rendered me all the more confused. Forgotten at the instant

was his amour with Mrs. Harborough: forgotten was everything but the sudden thrill of pleasure which the pressure of his hand and the masculine melody of his voice sent through my entire frame. My hand must have trembled in his own—he must have seen my confusion too—he must have imagined that he was not altogether indifferent to me; for he retained the hand—he pressed it—I did not withdraw it—and he raised it to his lips. Then, with that unaccountable access of caprice which oftentimes seizes upon the heart which nevertheless truly and fondly loves, I snatched away my hand, and resumed my seat upon the sofa,—indicating a chair for Captain Fortescue.

"Miss Lambert," he said, "you have done me the honour to receive me; and perhaps I had better begin by asking whether you really manifested your displeasure by returning negative responses to the repeated messages I took the liberty of sending within the last fortnight—"

"Only one of those messages reached me, Captain Fortescue," I interrupted him; and that was on the day after the burglary. Perhaps," I added, tremblingly and hesitatingly, "I have not shown myself sufficiently grateful for your kind succour on that occasion—I mean that I ought to have expressed my thanks personally—"

"No matter, Miss Lambert," he exclaimed, "since I have at length the pleasure of being admitted once more to your presence. My messages have been intercepted—that is clear enough; and answers have been invented which you yourself never sent. Of course I understand how this is. But, Miss Lambert," he went on to

observe, with a deprecating look, "you surely will not continue displeased if in an hour of folly—in one of those moods when a man abandons himself to the temptation of the moment—I condescended to a passing amour with a woman who has no earthly claim to any serious or permanent attention on my part."

"Captain Fortescue," I responded, with blushing cheeks, "it is not for me to pass an opinion upon your actions."

"Ah! but you were displeased, Miss Lambert—I am convinced you were!" he ejaculated: "and that displeasure—strange as the assertion may seem—filled me with happiness. Yes—I was happy when I found that you were displeased inasmuch as from that moment I was inspired with a hope which I dared not cherish before!"

"Captain Fortescue," I murmured, still blushing deeply, and feeling myself trembling from head to foot—for I saw that the moment of avowal was approaching,— "this is a topic which—"

"Cannot be avoided, beautiful creature that you are! No—it is a topic which I must pursue until you give me my final response. Rose—dearest Rose, I love you—Oh! you know that I love you!"—and he threw himself at my feet.

"Oh, the happiness of that moment!—Oh, the ecstacy of those feelings which welled up like a blessed fountain from the very depths of my heart! It was a pure and chaste love which I experienced for that man: I felt that it was so—a love without the slightest taint of gross passion—a love which my soul was enabled to experience, polluted though my body had become.

"Yes—I love you dearest Rose," murmured Reginald, in that low

melting voice which, full of a masculine music, sinks down into the profundities of the heart and awakes the echoes of every tenderly responsive chord that vibrates there,—“I love you, beautiful creature, that you are! I adore you—I have worshipped your image from the very first instant that I saw you! Oh, how I have envied that man,”—thus alluding to Alvanly, “the possession of such a treasure! And it was in jealousy—in a sort of mad recklessness—in the hope, perhaps, of bringing about an opportunity for an avowal—that I surrendered myself to that amour the coarseness and unsentimentality of which I now utterly loathe! Dearest, sweetest Rose, do you accept the love which now on my knees I proffer you?”

He took my hand—he pressed it to his lips: I did not withdraw it—my heart had no caprice vitiating its ecstatic pleasure at this moment. I experienced a full deep sense of joy such as I had never known before. As, under the influence of those feelings, I bent forward to him—gazing upon his handsome countenance—looking down into the depths of his dark eyes to read the love of which his lips had spoken,—his arm was gently passed round my neck—our lips met—and they lingered in one long delicious kiss.

At that instant the door was thrown open; and Mr. Alvanly appeared upon the threshold. A half-stifled shriek burst from my lips: but never shall I forget the calm and collected manner in which Reginald Fortescue rose up from his knees, and instantaneously assuming so manly a demeanour that it turned my sudden terror of Alvanly into admiration for himself,—he said, “Sir, it would be ridiculous to deny one

single syllable of anything which I have been uttering to this lady, and of all of which perhaps you have been a listener. No more need now be said: any friend yours, sir, will know where to find me.”

I did not look towards Gustavus: my eyes remained fixed upon Reginald Fortescue, in whom I beheld a champion as well as a lover. But when those words, so fearfully significant, fell upon my ears, I started up, exclaiming, “No! for heaven’s sake, let not lives be perilled on my account!”

“Rose—dearest Rose,” hastily whispered Reginald, “tranquillize yourself—leave these things to us—it is inevitable—but you are well worth the risk of a thousand lives, if I possessed them!”—then gently replacing me on the sofa, he advanced towards Alvanly, observing, “Perhaps, sir, under circumstances, we had both better withdraw and leave Miss Lambert alone.”

“Certainly, Captain Fortescue—that is the only course,” answered Gustavus: and without bestowing upon me a single word of reproach and upbraiding—but with a generous forbearance which smote me with remorse for my conduct towards him—he quitted the room, followed by Captain Fortescue.

A faintness came over me: I felt as if I had been guilty of some tremendous crime which suddenly converted into mortal foes two men who were intimate friends a few instants before, and which would lead to the risking of lives—perhaps to bloodshed and death—on my account. That faintness however was quickly succeeded by a renewal of wild affright, as I thought of those probabilities; and in a frenzied state I rushed to the window.

Alvanly was passing along the street in one direction—Fortescue in another. They had separated—but perhaps only to seek a friend in order to prepare for extremities! What was I to do? Must a duel take place on my account? Oh, I was powerless to prevent it! A thousand wild ideas swept through my brain. I would hasten to Gustavus—I would implore him to forgive me—I would consent to remain true and faithful to him if he would forego this duel! The thought was ridiculous: though he had so magnanimously forborne from reproaches, yet would he doubtless spurn me, if I sought him at his own dwelling. Besides, he had seen my lips pressed to those of his rival—he had seen that rival's arm clasp my neck—he knew that I had listened with pleasure to the language of love: how could he forgive me? how could he even confide in me any more? Then I would hasten to Reginald Fortescue—I would vow and declare that if he fought this duel, there should be an end to everything between us—and that I would recall the promise of love which had been given by the kisses from my lips. No: this project was as insane as the other. The world's code of honour, as fantastic as it is barbaric, would demand that Reginald Fortescue should meet Gustavus in a duel, if the latter thought fit to provoke it; and could I expect that, even as the price of my love, an officer with a sword by his side would consent to brand himself with dishonour? Oh, there was nothing that I could do to prevent this hostile meeting—it must take place—and in the interval what hideous, horrible, excruciating suspense would be mine!

Yes: and such was indeed my portion for many long weary hours. Dinner was served up: I sat down to table—but scarcely a mouthful passed my lips: I only went through the ceremony to prevent the domestics from imagining there was something wrong. That they as yet entertained no such suspicion, I was assured: for no disturbance had taken place—the two rivals had conducted themselves not merely with gentlemanly calmness, but also with the utmost discretion. Even Mrs. Harborough herself could have no surmise of what had taken place or what was in progress; or she would very soon, with her brazen impudence, have come up to me to worm out explanations. But what almost preterhuman efforts it cost me to preserve a degree of calmness in presence of the servant who waited at table—and likewise before Frances, when I retired for the night I was glad to find myself at length alone.

Glad!—no the term is inconsistent with the true state of my feelings: though in one sense it was a relief to be thus enabled, in the solitude of my chamber, to give unrestrained vent to my tears—for they *did* flow profusely the instant Frances had withdrawn. Hours elapsed ere I could close my eyes in slumber; and when sleep was at length brought on as the effect of sheer exhaustion, it was haunted with troubled dreams. Methought I beheld a gory corpse standing by my bedside, reproaching me as the authoress of its murder: then it seemed that the corpse itself lay stretched by my side—that my eyes were open—that I was gazing upon it in a dread horror which kept me immovable—and that its dull glassy orbs, fixed with

the stony glare of death, were riveted upon me. These and other equally frightful visions made me pass the most shocking of nights; and when I awoke in the morning I was so ill, but at the same time so nervously excited, that I felt as if I must do something desperate—yet I knew not what—to shake off the dreadful sensation which clung to me like a poisoned garment.

I looked my watch: it was past eight o'clock. I remembered having read in novels and in newspapers that duels invariably took place at a very early hour in the morning ere the life of the great city was well awake; and now the agonizing idea flashed to my mind that perhaps a human existence had already passed away on my account—per adventure even *two* lives, if the worst had been accomplished; or at all events, fearful injuries and ghastly wounds might have been inflicted. It was horrible—horrible! Oh, the worthless being that I was in comparison with two valuable human lives!—and that such lives, emanating from the Divinity itself, should be endangered, or perhaps positively lost for such a creature as I—it seemed a monstrous outrage upon the providence of heaven itself!

When Frances entered the room to assist me with my morning toilet, she was evidently struck by my appearance; and after some little hesitation, said, "I do not think you are well to-day, ma'am?"

"No—I have a bad headache: but I hope it will be better presently. Give me my wrapper: I will not linger at the toilet-table now: you shall do my hair presently."

I descended to the breakfast-parlour; and scarcely had I reached it, when a note was brought up

by the servant of the house. I instantaneously recognised Mr. Alvanly's handwriting; and the horrible thought flashed to my mind that Reginald Fortescue had been killed. Or else wherefore had not he come? wherefore had he not written? A film came over my eyes: the room seemed to be turning round: the note dropped from my hand. But this incident recalled me to full life; and unable to endure suspense any longer, I tore open the billet. Its contents ran as follow:—

"May Fair, June 15th, 1841.

"ROSE. —

"As a matter of course everything is at an end between us. I have just encountered Captain Fortescue on hostile ground: my left arm is slightly touched—but it is nothing; and you need not experience any remorse on that score. We separate: we part, to meet not again—or if to meet, only as mere passing acquaintances. Such is the way of the world. Those who are most intimate one day, may become comparative strangers the next. I bear no ill-will towards you. I do not think you have any particular cause to be unfriendly towards me. I have loved you—perhaps better than I ever loved any woman yet: but I neither pay myself such an ill compliment, nor believe you to be so credulous as to suppose that I shall not be able to surmount the feeling.

"I write this principally to give you the assurance that I am not embittered against you: I have another motive; and it is this:—Knowing something of your disposition, and giving you credit for a great deal of delicacy and propriety of sentiment, I consider it

as well to convey the positive assurance that everything you have in your possession is entirely yours, and that you would really offend me, and veritably convert me into an enemy, if you were to attempt to return any little trifle which I have had the pleasure and gratification of bestowing upon you.

"And now farewell! When we meet—which we must necessarily do, more or less often, in places of public-resort—favour me with an acknowledgment of the bow which with frank courtesy I shall make to you; and let us not fear to look each other in the face for a moment while passing. If we can exchange smiles as friends, so much the better.

"GUSTAVUS ALVANLY."

I was much affected with this letter. It was entirely characteristic of the writer's disposition, which was a strange medley of good feelings and worldly-minded notions—generous tendencies, blended with the unscrupulousness of the man-about-town—delicate feelings conveyed in flippant language. The tenour of the epistle was altogether liberal, as well as handsome in its assurances; and I wept as I reflected that he had been wounded on account of me—but I sincerely hoped that the injury was as trifling as he represented it. Scarcely had I somewhat recovered from the emotions excited by the billet, when a second note was brought up, and the handwriting of the address was immediately recognised by me as Captain Fortescue's. It contained the following lines:—

"No.—, Pall Mall.

"DEAREST AND BELOVED ROSE,

"I lose not a moment, on my return to my lodgings, to convey

the assurance that I have escaped without injury. Alvanly behaved like a man of honour as well as of courage. Shots were only exchanged once; and my bullet penetrated his left arm, which by his position was exposed more than it ought to have been. The surgeon whom we had with us immediately extracted the bullet, and pronounced it to be his opinion that the bone was uninjured and that the wound would heal speedily. Not being overcome with faintness, and having his right arm perfectly unhurt, Alvanly might have insisted on a second exchange of shots had he chosen: but he declared himself satisfied—and shaking me by the hand, said these words: "I bear you no ill-will, Fortescue. The laws of honour are complied with; and the past can be forgotten. You possess the love of a very beautiful and well-conducted girl: I sincerely hope your connexion may contribute to the happiness of you both."—Thus spoke Alvanly: and we left the ground in our respective equipages.

"Believe me, dearest Rose," I am full of anxiety to fly to you: but my appearance in Jermyn Street at so early an hour might perhaps lead to suspicions in a certain quarter, and produce unpleasantness. Will the following arrangements be acceptable to you?—that I shall immediately secure you suitable apartments in an agreeable quarter of the West End—that all preliminaries shall be settled to-day—so that you may remove thither either this evening or the first thing to-morrow morning, before the rumour of the duel can have been well whispered abroad. Rest assured that every attention shall be paid to your comforts in your new home. A line, informing me whether you

approve of these arrangements—or whether you have other commands to signify—will afford me infinite pleasure.

“Accept a thousand kisses, sweetest, dearest Rose, from

“Your ever affectionate,

“REGINALD FORTESCUE.

“P.S. By the bye, I forgot to mention that my bankers are Messrs. Cox and Greenwood, Craig Court, Charing Cross, and that I am forthwith going thither to direct that your cheques are to be honoured.”

If Alvanly's letter had brought tears to my eyes, Fortescue's conjured up smiles to my lips—save and except with regard to that sentence in which he gave me to understand that the wound Gustavus had received was somewhat more severe than he himself had represented it. Still, however, there was every reason to hope that no more serious consequences would ensue; and with this I solaced myself. As for all the rest of Reginald's note I was pleased by the delicate manner in which he suggested the most suitable arrangements to be carried out and in which he evidently advised a speedy removal from Jermyn street so that I might not be subjected to any annoyance from the effects of Mrs Harborough's jealousy. I hastened to transmit an answer, thanking Reginald for his kind communication—assuring him that I left every arrangement to his discretion—but that I should like to remove in the evening, if in the interval he would let me know the address of my new home. I hinted as delicately as I could that it would perhaps be better for him not to visit me during the day in Jermyn Street. Having sent off this note, I at

once gave instructions to my servants to commence packing up my things; and I bade Frances inform Mrs. Harborough that I intended to leave in the course of the evening. The domestics were evidently surprised at this sudden resolve on my part: but as my orders were accompanied with the intimation that they were to follow me to my new place of abode, there was no other feeling beyond that of mere curiosity which they need entertain on the subject. I reflected whether I ought to write a note to Mr. Alvanly in acknowledgment of his billet: but I came to the conclusion that it was better not—for on the first occasion that we should happen to meet, it would be easy for me to convince him by the affability with which I acknowledged his salutation that I harboured no ill-will against him, and accepted the terms on which he proposed we were thenceforth to stand towards each other.

Being now relieved from a state of the cruellest suspense with regard to the duel—and looking forward to the pleasure of enjoying the society of a man whom I really loved—I was speedily enabled to shake off that indisposition with which I had risen in the morning. I had more than one motive for having written to Reginald requesting him not to visit me during the day: I was not merely afraid of a scene with the brazen-faced Mrs. Harborough—but I had likewise the appointment to keep with Lady Lucia Calthorpe at three o'clock in Hyde Park. Accordingly, at about half-past two, I entered a hackney-coach and proceeded to the Park,—going thither alone, and dressed with as much plainness and simplicity as my elegant wardrobe would permit. Shortly

after entering the Park, I alighted from the vehicle—ordered it to wait for me—and repaired in the direction of the bridge. Consulting my watch, I found that it wanted five minutes to three; and I accordingly walked about until the exact hour for which the appointment was made. Then I returned to the bridge; and loitering there for a minute or two, beheld a lady, closely veiled—but of the same height as Lady Lucia—advancing slowly with the air of one who was in search of some person. She also was dressed in as unpretending a manner as possible. She was of rather tall stature—finely formed,—elegance and dignity combining in her gait. As for the condition of the unfortunate young lady in respect to being in the way to become a mother, this was not visible to any one who suspected not the circumstance.

As she drew near where I stood, she stopped short; and I saw that she was trembling nervously, as she contemplated my countenance through the thick folds of her veil.

"It is I whom you seek, Lady Lucia," I said, in a kind voice. "Let us walk away to the most secluded spot amongst the trees."

"You are very good to have kept this appointment," she answered, in a tremulous voice; "because you assured me that it was for a friendly purpose—and I believe it. There is something in your countenance which gives me this conviction."

"You may indeed believe it, Lady Lucia," I responded: "for I have no earthly reason to deceive you—but every motive to befriend you. We will not, however, speak another word until

we gain a spot where we may converse without restraint."

In a few minutes we reached such a spot—and placed ourselves on a bench beneath one of the large trees on the southern side of the Serpentine. Lady Lucia now raised her veil: she evidently thought it would be too coldly formal, and even ungracious on her part, to retain it over her features, as mine was thrown back. As the reader will recollect, I had not before seen her countenance: it was eminently handsome;—but even allowing for the present agitation of her feelings, I concluded that it must be naturally inexpressive and passionless. Her hair was of raven darkness, with the richest gloss upon it: her eyes, of corresponding hue, were large and bright—but with a meaningless lustre, if the term can be understood. There was no softness of sentiment—no vibrating play of feeling in those orbs. Her complexion was of alabaster fairness—but of that transparency which showed the delicate tracery of blue veins: so that it was not a dead inanimate whiteness. Her features were Grecian—classically chiselled—the lips of a bright vermilion—the teeth faultlessly beautiful. The brows were nobly arched—darkly but not coarsely pencilled: the lashes formed thick fringes for the fine dark eyes. There was certainly something rigidly statue-like in that countenance; and I could very well fancy that when entirely unruffled by any particular feeling or emotion, it had a cold, inanimate look, with an air of patrician dignity which overawed and chilled rather than with that true feminine affability which encourages cheerfulness of conversation. That she was

one who would have voluntarily surrendered herself up to Horace Rockingham's arms, was not for an instant to be supposed: her very pride would have formed the best bulwark of her virtue, even if her temperament were not naturally cold. But with the first glance which I threw upon her countenance, I read in its passionless expression the complete confirmation of the tremendous charge of diabolic outrage which, in the dark avenue in her aunt's grounds, she had levelled against that unscrupulous young miscreant.

I did not gaze upon her long enough to produce any confusion on her part: a few instants' survey of her countenance were sufficient to show me in what it was attractive, and in what it was deficient—and that it was the face of a beautiful statue, without the light of the mind or the reflex of the heart's emotions playing upon it.

"Your ladyship had better resume your veil," I said; "for it were not well that you should be recognised by any one passing: and I also will lower mine."

"You know who I am," observed Lucia, as she followed my suggestion: "but perhaps you have forgotten that as yet I know not who you are—and that I can but barely conjecture how my secret should have become revealed to you. But even then I am at a loss to conceive how your sympathies should have been enlisted on my behalf."

"I am Mrs. Wilton," was my answer; for I had previously made up my mind not on any account to let Lady Lucia know who I really was. "My husband is abroad—in the East India service—and I am for the present

living with an elderly female relation in London. As to the manner in which I became possessed of your secret, you have doubtless already surmised it. At all events I will explain. The night before last my veil and mask came off in the confusion which followed the incident at the pagoda. As I fled, fearing to be overtaken by the sparks which the rocket shed forth—and being separated from the gentleman (a cousin of mine, I should observe) by whom I was accompanied—I beheld the gray domino lying on the ground. Half in bewilderment, and half in jest, I put it on: but no sooner had I assumed it, than a gentleman caught me by the hand exclaiming. This way! this way! I was again seized with a panic-terror. In my confusion I thought he was considerably hurrying me away from some threatening danger—and I accompanied him. He led me to a seat, on which I fell half fainting with fright and exhaustion. Then, addressing me as Lucia, he began pouring forth a volley of words, every one of which was a startling revelation. He mentioned the Marchioness of Sudbury as the aunt of her for whom he took me; and thus was it that I comprehended that I was so taken for your ladyship's self. I was so astounded at all I heard, that I had not the power to interrupt him: my lips were sealed—I was petrified with wonderment. Voices and footsteps were heard approaching—we separated—I threw the gray domino upon the grass, on resuming my own disguise, which my cousin, whom I speedily encountered, had happened to pick up and recognised to be mine. When I was enabled—"

"But to that cousin of yours, Mrs. Wilton," said Lucia, with

the anxiety of suspense—"did you breathe a syllable—"

"Not a syllable!" I ejaculated: "I would not for worlds have done so! But when I subsequently reflected on all I had heard, I could come to no other conclusion than that you must stand in need of a faithful female friend—of one who, when the hour of trial approaches, would render you all possible succour—and who would even help you to veil your secret from the world—a friend who from purely sympathetic motives would do all this! And that friend you have now by your side, if you chose to trust her."

"I know not how to express my gratitude for so much kindness," answered Lady Lucia, taking my hand and pressing it with more warmth than, judging by her countenance, she was capable of displaying. "Yes—in a short time I shall indeed require the succour of such a friend as you have offered to become—though heaven knows how I may even be enabled to render that succour available, and escape for a period from the bosom of my family! not for worlds would I have my secret suspected by any scion of that family! It is one of the haughtiest and the proudest in all England; and my shame—my dishonour—would be regarded as the most terrific of the calamities!"

After a little more conversation, I gleaned from Lady Lucia that in three months more she might expect to become a mother—that she felt tolerably confident of being able to conceal her situation for perhaps two months longer—and the only person whose prying eyes she feared was her maid. I represented to her that it was absolutely necessary to admit this maid into her

confidence: for if she were to dispense with her services at the toilet, it would only confirm whatsoever suspicion she already entertained—or would actually engender such suspicion if none were as yet awakened. Besides, I argued that as it would be absolutely necessary for Lady Lucia to leave home on some pretext in about two months' time, her maid would have to accompany her; and thus sooner or later the woman must be taken into her confidence. It evidently wounded the young lady's pride in its most sensitive point to contemplate the necessity of avowing her condition to a menial: but she was forced to admit the justice of my reasoning, and promised to be guided by my counsel. I then assured her that when the time arrived for her to withdraw for a brief space from the world, I would meet her again, to advise with her on the best pretext to be advanced to her family; and that I would also provide for her a suitable abode in some secluded place, where, under a feigned name, she might pass through the ordeal. Again she thanked me with considerable fervour: she took my hand, pressed it between both her own, and called me her best and dearest friend,—vowing that her gratitude would only terminate with life itself.

"But if, my dear Mrs. Wilton," she said, "I wish to communicate with you before the date of any fresh appointment which we may presently make, where will a note find you?"

"It would be unsafe to write to me," I answered, being prepared for the question, "to the house where I am living with my aunt and cousin: for, to tell the truth, my elderly relative is somewhat

inquisitive—and if I did not happen to be in the way when the letter came, she would scarcely hesitate to open it. Your ladyship had better address to me at some post-office, where I would call occasionally to inquire whether there be a note for me. Let it be the office in Cavendish Street, Oxford Street."

"I shall not forget," answered Lucia: and again did she pour forth the expressions of her gratitude.

"Pardon me," said I, in a hesitating manner,—"pardon me for the question I am about to put, and for the allusion which it involves: but think you, Lady Lucia, that you are likely again to encounter—"

"I know whom you mean," she quickly interrupted me. "No, not our separation is eternal. He will not voluntarily seek me," she added, bitterly; and rest assured that I shall not seek him."

"If it should happen," I rejoined, "that you do meet, it will be as well not to mention me in any way. My relatives—my husband too, when he returns home—might be vexed and angry if it came to their knowledge that I had been led by sympathy and friendly feeling to interfere in this matter."

"It would be but an ungrateful return on my part," responded Lady Lucia, "if I were to do aught contrary to your interests and wishes. No, dear Mrs. Wilton—I am incapable of such an act! And as for that unprincipled young man—that vile, infamous, fiend-like wretch," she went on to say with a deep concentrated bitterness of tone; infinite is my regret that I humbled myself to him—that I besought him to make me reparation! Good heavens, such a husband as

that! to be tied to such a man for life!—No, no: exposure and dishonour were even preferable! Would you believe, Mrs. Wilton, that some months back at the very time when arrangements were making for our nuptials—he was debased and profligate enough to pay his court to some loose, abandoned female—some infamous courtesan—I shudder in giving expression to the word which personifies the foul existence of such a creature in feminine shape!"

"You would do well not to excite yourself," I said: and the reader may suppose with what poignant, lacerating, vulture-tearing feelings I was inwardly agitated as all those expressions fell upon my ears, raining like drops of molten lead upon my heart—piercing like a shower of arrows into my very soul!

"You are right, my dear friend?" responded the Earl's daughter, growing completely calm again: "I am wrong to waste my indignation upon either so cold-blooded a wretch as Horace Rockingham," or so loathsome a creature as that woman to whom I was alluding. But we must separate now; and once more I beseech you to accept the assurances of my gratitude—my esteem—my love."

Again she wrung my hands in a fervid manner; and we parted, —Lady Lucia proceeding in one direction, and I taking another in order to regain the hackney-coach which was waiting for me. Ah! little did the proud patrician's daughter suspect that the very being against whom her rancorous words were poured forth—the very one whom she had thus mercilessly dragged through the mire, the mud, the dirt, and feculence of her scorn, abhorrence,

and disgust—had been seated by her side, had been in close contact with her, and was regarded as some dear friend whom heaven had sent to succour her when the hour of her need should come! Oh, if some bird could have whispered at the time in the ear of Lucia Calthorpe—"That countenance on which you gaze with interest and pleasure, and which you regard as a kind and sympathizing one—those hands which you so warmly clasp and press in both your own—that form which is in contiguity with yours as you sit together beneath the shade of this tree,—all these belong to her against whom you are levelling such bitter, merciless, pitiless denunciations!"—if a little bird, I say, could have thus whispered in the ears of the patrician lady, what would have been her wonder!—and perhaps what her horror and disgust! But though she was dishonoured and degraded—though she had lost her virgin purity, and was defiled in body though she still retained the cold glacial chastity of her soul—her heart was not touched on behalf of the feelings and weaknesses of a fellow-creature; but she evidently thought that she still stood on the most exalted pedestal in comparison with her whom she reviled, and that she had a right thus mentally to spurn the scorned and abhorred one from her feet!

My interview with Lady Lucia left no very pleasurable impressions on my mind. I was profoundly humiliated and acutely hurt on my own account: I was disappointed with regard to her disposition. I found that I had judged her too kindly when I had fancied that the depth of feeling with which she addressed Horace Rockingham in the shady avenue,

might be taken as the criterion of her character. I now comprehend her better: I saw that she habitually cold and passionless, so as to be almost unfeeling—at least constitutionally callous and apathetic—and that powerful causes alone could excite her into a sense of strong emotion, as the violence of an earthquake could alone agitate the ocean from its very depths. Nevertheless I was determined to befriend her. I had made up my mind to do so: it was no whim nor caprice on my part—it was because I really pitied her: and methought likewise that a good action disinterestedly performed, would in the eyes of heaven mitigate the extent of my own errors and frailties.

It was five o'clock when I returned to my lodgings in Jermyn Street; and I found a note from Reginald Fortescue, to the effect that he had hired a furnished house for me in Sloane Street, Chelsea. I was well pleased that he should have fixed upon this locality inasmuch as it was sufficiently remote from Jermyn Street as well as from May Fair; and as I afterwards learnt, it was for these very reasons that he had looked about in that quarter for what he was in search of. It was also distant from Portman Square, where the Eveleigh's dwelt; and though Reginald Fortescue suspected not that I had the slightest reason for avoiding that particular neighbourhood, the circumstance that he should have chosen me a dwelling so distant therefrom, was a source of satisfaction. To be brief. I removed from Jermyn Street to Sloane Street that same evening,—Mrs. Harborough taking leave of me with so much affability, that I felt assured she had not

the faintest suspicion under whose protection I was now passing. My servants followed with my trunks and boxes; and when the house was reached, Captain Fortescue came forth to welcome me to my new home.

It was a moderate-sized but convenient house—handsomely furnished—and with the advantage of having no landlord or landlady occupying a portion of it. It was all my own. Reginald had lavished good in order to have it thoroughly put in order during the afternoon for my reception; and in every respect he had shown himself most considerate. Never did he seem to me more handsome—never more fascinating or agreeable, than when we were seated together in the drawing-room that evening,—he surveying me with mingled rapture and triumph, and I bending upon him looks of the tenderest and sincerest love.

I must close this chapter with a few observations in respect to Reginald's circumstances and the mode of life which I now began to lead under his protection. He was, as the reader is already aware, a Captain in the Life Guards—about five-and-twenty years of age—and unmarried. He was naturally intelligent—had been well educated—and had not altogether failed to profit by his school and college tuition. Though from habit his conversation was generally of that style which is prevalent in fashionable circles, he could nevertheless discourse on books, the arts and sciences and such intellectual topics when he chose. He was less satirical in his remarks upon others than was Gustavus Alvanly; and altogether I preferred him infinitely as a companion, apart from the real affection which I had con-

ceived for him. He was an only son: his mother had died when he was a boy: his father, Sir Reginald Fortescue, was a Baronet living upon his estates in the North of England, and very seldom visiting London. Twice a year, however, he expected that his son would pay him a visit of a few weeks; and this Reginald had hitherto done with the tolerable regularity—for the simple reason (as I subsequently learnt) that he availed himself of those opportunities to obtain from "the governor," as he denominated his father, a renewal of the pecuniary supplies which were sure to be in the meantime exhausted at his Bankers. Sir Reginald however was rich and was no niggard in furnishing his son and heir with considerable sums of money. The old gentleman had lived nearly all his life in the country, and was easily led to believe that Reginald could not possibly maintain his position as a Captain in the Life Guards without a handsome income. But inasmuch as the Baronet had some friends in London whom he had requested to write occasionally and let him know how his son was getting on, the gallant Captain being aware of this sort of supervision which was exercised over him, maintained all the outward decencies of a sufficiently steady life—so that no evil reports had ever as yet been transmitted to his sire. In order, therefore, to lull that confiding father into a continued security on the point, Reginald intimated to me as delicately as possible, that I must still continue to bear the name of Miss Lambert and not adopt his own—that he could not live with me altogether—that he must retain his apartments in Pall Mall—and that it would be impolitic for him to be seen too often in my company

in Park-drives or elsewhere. But on the other hand he promised that he would be with me as much as possible: he made arrangements with a livery-stable keeper to provide me a carriage and pair, with servants in livery for my own special accommodation, and he hinted that his means would enable him to allow me about a thousand a year for my maintenance. Thus, in a worldly point of view, I was perhaps better off than when living under the protection of Mr. Alvanly—while so far as sentiment was concerned, I was infinitely happier.

I should observe that the circumstances of the duel was kept so quiet that no mention of it was made in the newspaper at all; and this was a source of considerable relief to Reginald's mind; for he was naturally afraid that if the hostile encounter had been paraded in the public prints, his father would have posted up to London, to ascertain the cause, and to assure himself that his son had really escaped without injury.

CHAPTER XII.

JEALOUSY.—THE SNARE.

ABOUT six weeks passed away; and during this interval I sent several times to the post-office in Cavendish Street to inquire for any letters that might be addressed to Mrs. Wilton and directed to be left there. But there were none: I consequently surmised that Lady Lucia had nothing of importance to communicate, and that she was still enabled to conceal her position from the world. I learnt too through the medium of the newspapers,

that the Earl of Eveleigh and his family had gone into the country and were remaining there—a circumstance which pleased me well enough, as I did not wish Lady Lucia to stand the chance of finding out who I really was, at least not before I should have rendered her the promised assistance.

I frequently met Mr. Alvanly when out for an airing in my carriage: he always made me the most courteous salutation, which I returned with a suitable affability: but we never stopped to speak. Some of those acquaintances to whom he had introduced me, continued to visit me in Sloane Street; and I did not discourage their advances—for I could not live without some sort of society. When Reginald was not with me, I had occasional moods of despondency: images of the past forced themselves upon my mind—and remorse on account of my deserted parents stirred my soul. But when Reginald was present, I forgot all those sources of trouble, and surrendered myself up entirely to the love which I experienced for him. Sometimes, however, his military duties kept him away from me a whole day at a time: and then was it that I needed the society of acquaintances to rescue me from despondency.

During these six weeks I saw nothing of my brother, though I had written to him to say whether I had removed; for he had mentioned his address when he called on me in Jermyn Street. I fancied he must have left London—and I hoped that it was so, inasmuch as he would perhaps thereby escape the mysterious workings of the malignant vengeance which Horace Rockingham had

threatened to wreak upon him. As for Horace himself, I beheld him on two or three occasions riding a beautiful horse in the Park: but I invariably averted my looks as he swept past my equipage—so that I remained ignorant in what manner he regarded me. I heard nothing from any quarter, either by the public prints or by whispered rumour, to justify the tale which he had told Lady Lucia of his father's impending ruin; and I began to imagine that it must after all have been a sheer wicked invention on his part.

Six weeks, as I have said, passed from the date on which I removed to Sloane Street. My love for Reginald grew into a perfect infatuation: I worshipped—I adored him. It appeared to me as if all my life's happiness were centred in him; and I shuddered at the bare idea that this present mode of existence was only a dream too beautiful and delicious to last. Sometimes, when he was seated by my side, I would suddenly throw my arms round his neck, strain him to my bosom, and hold him with convulsive tightness there, as if I feared lest some hand were being stretched forth to snatch him away from me for ever. On his side, he was fond and loving—far more endearing even than Alvanly. Now that I was enabled to compare the conduct of the two towards me, I comprehend that Gustavus had always treated me more or less as a mistress whose favours he purchased: whereas Reginald bore himself towards me with a far more refined delicacy. Gustavus had been somewhat ostentatious in making me present: Reginald, on the other hand, professed them not as mere embel-

lishments for my person, but as tributes of love. I likewise now understood that Alvanly had been proud of parading me as his mistress to his acquaintances: whereas Reginald always wished us to be alone during the time he was enabled to pass with me. In a word, my former protector never put off the habits and discourse of the thorough man-of-the-world: whereas my present one appeared to become a sentimentally altered being one in my society. The contrast I thus drew was therefore most favourable for the latter; and despite the occasional moods of despondency, these six weeks of which I have been speaking constituted the happiest period I had yet known since I fled from the paternal dwelling.

Loving Reginald Fortescue as I did, my anguish and dismay may be conceived when I one afternoon received the following letter, written in a beautiful female hand:—

“August 1st 1841.

“Without being personally known to you, I have seen you frequently and feel much interest on your behalf. The sweet beauty of your countenance, the modesty of your demeanour, and the general correctness of your conduct, apart from your actual position—have inspired me with that feeling. I am aware of your connection with Reginald Fortescue: and being myself the victim of his perfidy I seek to save you from a similar fate, by giving you this timely warning ere your heart becomes too deeply enmeshed in the web of infatuation. To me was he as he now is to you—all gentleness, all seeming kindness, all apparent affection; and I believe him to be sincere, as you believe him. One day I was awakened from this blissful

dream with the same suddenness as if a thunderbolt had fallen at my feet. In a moment was I cast off—put away from him, as if by a magic process my beauty had become turned into loathsomeness. A similar fate is in store for you; the storm is even now above your head: it will burst soon. While you imagine that your lover is engaged in his military duties, he entertains your rival at his lodgings in Pall Mall. This very day will that rival be with him! I know everything—though he suspects not I watch his actions. I conjure you to destroy this note as soon as it is read; and breathe not in his ears a syllable of its contents. Let him not know that you have received it. You shall hear more from me in due time.

“YOUR UNKNOWN FRIEND.”

This letter filled me with despair. I had no power to reason in respect to the intelligence it contained: the demon of jealousy seized upon my soul—I felt half mad. When parting from me at a somewhat early hour in the morning, Reginald had told me he should not be enabled to see me again until the morrow, as he had to do duty at the Horse Guards in Whitehall; and this note convinced me all in a moment that this tale was a mere subterfuge. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when it came: the weather was unfavourable—the rain was descending fast—and purposing to remain indoors, I had countermanded the carriage for that day. But I was resolved to go at once and ascertain the truth. No—this was scarcely my motive: it was rather to unmask the perfidious Reginald, and overwhelm my rival with upbraidings and

reproaches in his frenzied state of mind I ordered a hackney-coach to be sent for—dressed myself hastily—entered the vehicle—and directed the driver to take me to Pall Mall. During the ride thither my mind was a prey to the most anguished, torturing reflections. Oh! I thought to myself, that so much love had been thrown away upon so worthless a being! I had no power to reason calmly nor to deliberate seriously; my soul was a volcano of conflicting feelings and lava-like passions, craving a vent. I could not weep: tears would have afforded that vent—but they flowed not from my eyes. As for the letter, so far from having destroyed it, I had retained it as an additional evidence of Reginald's perfidy; and so far from intending to remain silent as to the receipt of it, I purposed to display it before his eyes.

In this almost infuriate state of mind I reached Pall Mall, and alighted at the house where my protector lived. The knock and the ring that I gave were more than imperious—they were violent: and the door was speedily opened by a valet, dressed in plain clothes. He was a smart good-looking man, between thirty and forty years of age; and he appeared somewhat astonished at the loudness of the summons which had brought him to the door.

“Is Captain Fortescue at home?” I asked, endeavouring as well as I could to assume an air of composure.

“No, ma'am,” responded the valet: for he did not know who I was—or if he did, chose to have the appearance of a discreet ignorance on the point.

“Are you sure?” I demanded, feeling convinced that he was uttering an untruth.

"I am certain, ma'am," he rejoined. "My master is on guard to-day, and will not come off until to-morrow morning."

I did not believe a syllable of this assertion: the conviction was deep in my mind that the valet was only obeying the instructions he had received to deny his master to all visitors in order that he might without restraint enjoy the society of my rival. But I was resolved not to be baffled: the blood was boiling in my veins—it tingled to my very extremities: I felt assured that I was perfidiously betrayed for the sake of a rival.

"If your master is not at home," I said, still maintaining an air of outward composure as well as I was able, "I will walk up and write him a note."

"But ma'am," observed the valet, with a look which struck me to be one of confusion, "there is no lady to receive you—the apartments are those of a bachelor—"

"No matter!" I interrupted him, believing that this remonstrance was merely part of a studied system of duplicity and subterfuge. "I will leave a few lines for Captain Fortescue."

I should observe that the house where my protector lived, belonged to a jeweller, who of course, had his shop and parlour on the ground floor. It was at the private door that I had knocked; and I knew, from what Reginald had told me that he occupied the first floor. I therefore passed hastily by the valet—and determined not to be held back any longer, began ascending the stairs. The man followed me without speaking another word. My blood boiled to a fever-heat, as I thought that now I was about to burst in upon my per-

fidious protector and surprise him in the arms of a rival. On reaching the landing I perceived that the three doors which were there all stood open. My glances plunged in to each of the three rooms in rapid succession:—indeed, the survey was made with lightning celerity. One was a bedchamber, which a female servant was putting in order at the moment; a second was a drawing-room, and I saw that not a soul was there. The third was a regular bachelor's sitting room: and this also was unoccupied.

I began to be astounded: a revulsion of feeling was rapidly taking place within me. Could I have been deceived? was my jealousy most groundlessly excited? Oh! a thought flashed to my mind with the speed of lightning. Idiot that I was not to have been smitten by it before! The same mischievous head that dictated anonymous letters to Gustavus Alvanly, might be now playing a similar game in the farther pursuit of the most fiendishly vindictive purposes. Was it not easy for such a deep designer to procure a female hand to pen a letter to me? But, alas! how had I been deceived by it. Yes—there was no longer a doubt: this was one of the detestable stratagems of Horace Rockingham. I was ready to sink with mingled confusion and shame: it appeared to me that I had committed an almost unpardonable outrage against Captain Fortescue. But what was I to do? It was absolutely necessary to maintain appearances in the presence of the valet: perhaps my emotions had already led him to suspect too much, and to suppose that jealousy was animating me in my extraordinary conduct.

"I will write a few lines to

Captain Fortescue," I murmured: and I passed hurriedly into that third room which I have already glanced at as a regular bachelor's apartment.

"Perhaps you will step into the drawing-room, ma'am—and I will bring you writing materials," said the valet, whose tone and demeanour were perfectly respectful.

"No—I thank you," was my response, hurriedly given: for I scarcely knew what I said, so ashamed and confused was I. "There are writing materials here—I shall not be a minute—I am sorry for the trouble I am giving—"

The valet bowed and retired. As he was descending the stairs, a knock at the front door reached my ears; and he immediately proceeded to answer the summons.

"Captain Fortescue," said a voice, speaking quite loud enough to be heard up in the room which I had entered, and the door of which had remained open, "has sent me up from the Horse Guards to fetch the novel that came last from the circulating library.

"You shall have it," immediately returned the valet and he again ascended the stairs.

Hers was proof positive, if any had been wanting, that my jealousy was utterly unfounded. Reginald was indeed at the guard-room, occupied with his military duties at the very time that I was mentally upbraiding him most bitterly! I literally shuddered and shivered with anguish and shame at the conduct of which I had been guilty and for which I could not even find an extenuation in the contents of that letter; because from the very first I ought to have suspected its

source. The valet proceeded to the drawing-room adjoining the apartment where I found myself; and immediately afterwards he descended the stairs again, no doubt having fetched the books which were required. I closed the door of the apartment where I was—I threw myself upon a chair—and gave vent to a flood of tears. For several minutes I wept bitterly: but those tears relieved me: and then I experienced a feeling of pleasure to think that the letter was untrue—that Reginald was not faithless to me—and that instead of devoting his time to a rival, he was indeed engaged with the duties of profession.

I wiped my eyes-- and now began to examine the room in which I found myself. Never was seen such a miscellaneous assortment of articles. There were foils and fishing-rods suspended to the walls—clothes tossed hither and thither—some on chairs, some on the carpet, some lying in an open pertmantau. There were several beautiful statues—some of alabaster, and some of marble; and if I had been in a humour to laugh, I could have done so heartily at the grotesque appearance of a hunting-cap on the head of an exquisite bust of a popular actress, as a name at the base indicated. There were hunting-whips and boxing-gloves—powder-flasks and shooting-jackets—top boots and slippers—an elegant flowered silk dressing-gown lying negligently here—countless pairs of buckskin gloves pell-mell there. On the table were quantities of letters—some more gloves—Reviews, Magazines, and newspapers—bottles of perfume—several articles of jewellery—divers seals, with armorial bearings and other devices—in short,

an infinite variety of all things which may be termed proper and peculiar to a bachelor's apartment. But, Ah! amongst the gloves on the table, were two or three much smaller and more delicate than their companions; and I recognised them as mine—or rather that they had once been mine. I knew also that I had lost them at the time when I was living in Jermyn Street, before I accepted the protection of Reginald Fortescue. Oh! then he had pilfered them then and there: the venial purloinings were proofs that he had loved me all along: and my heart was again filled with ineffable emotions at this evidence of that attachment. But more still—in an exquisitely worked box of mother-of-pearl, the lid of which was open, was a long ringlet of my hair, which he had begged me to bestow upon him but a few days previously. And I insensate that I was! had suffered myself to be beguiled by the execrable falsehoods of the insidious letter.

But I recollected that I had intimated to the valet my intention to write a few lines; and it would look strange if I did not leave a note for his master. Besides, on Reginald's return home, he would learn that I had been thither; and it was absolutely necessary I should leave some written explanation. Ah! explanation—Yes, and the fullest too: for I had cruelly outraged him. But what better explanation could I give than the vile letter which I had received? And yet would it not wound his feelings deeply and outrage him atrociously? Nevertheless, for my own sake, it was absolutely requisite after the step I had taken.

I drew it forth again; and as I stood at the table, read it atten-

tively from beginning to end. More than ever was I astonished at my own blindness in not having seen that it was the mere effort of an execrable vindictiveness. Besides, I now reflected that Reginald Fortescue, in the loftiness of his nature, would scorn that letter, and treat it with contempt, instead of suffering it to annoy him. I accordingly hesitated no longer to enclose it in a note of my own: I sat down, and taking up a pen, began to write. I confessed the jealous feelings which had brought me to his lodging—implored his forgiveness—besought him to regard my conduct only as a proof of love—and concluded with the assurance that I should be tortured by anxiety until I saw him again, to receive from his own lips that pardon which I was convinced he would not refuse. Having finished my letter. I placed it in an envelope, together with the one which had so excited my jealousy; and I was about to light a taper to seal the packet, when a loud double-knock at the front door echoed through the house.

I sprang up from the seat: my heart leapt within me. Perhaps this was Reginald? The messenger who had come for his books, might have been directed to tell him that a lady was at his lodgings? I heard the front door open—voices were speaking—but I could not catch what they said; for I had closed the door of the apartment. In a few moments, however, footsteps began to ascend the stairs—not the light rapid footsteps of youth, but the slow heavy dragging ones of old age. My hope was dissipated in an instant: it was not Reginald. A visitor then? But the valet would be certain to show him

into the drawing-room, and not bring him in collision with me! The footsteps reached the landing: they passed not into the drawing-room—they approached the apartment where I was. The door opened; and an old gentleman made his appearance. He was over sixty years of age—of middle height—stoutly built—though evidently infirm, perhaps gouty in his limbs. He wore a blue coat with brass buttons—a buff waistcoat—and nankeen pantaloons. An elaborate frill, of snowy whiteness, projected from the bosom of his shirt: he was remarkably neat and clean in his person; and every detail of his toilet denoted punctilious care. His hat, low in the crown, had a very broad brim; and he walked with a good-headed cane. His face was round and red: its expression, naturally good-humoured, was now somewhat severe.—as, having taken off his hat and bowed, he surveyed me with a serious scrutiny.

"You are waiting to see Captain Fortescue, madam?" said the gentlemen, in a tone which though partially interrogative, also indicated that he knew the correctness of the assertion implied by the question itself.

"I—I—sir—did come for that purpose," I stammered out confusedly; "but it is of no consequence, sir—I have left a letter for him:" and having thus spoken, I endeavoured to leave the room.

"One moment, madam!" said the old gentleman, courteously yet firmly signalling me to remain.

"Is it any particular business on which you were desirous to see Captain Fortescue?"—and now he eyed me in a severe manner.

"No, sir—I have already said it is nothing particular—I am sorry to have intruded—I did not think to meet anybody here."

"Perhaps not," said the old gentleman drily "However, of course, it is not for me to penetrate into Captain Fortescue's affairs—nor yet those of any ladies who may visit him:—and methought that he uttered these last words with a subdued irony.

"He, however, stood away from the door which he left open to afford me egress; and he bowed coldly and distantly as I passed him by. Covered with confusion, I hurried down the stairs, wondering who this old gentleman could be—when all in an instant the thought flashed to my brain that it might be Reginald's father. Good heavens! if this surmise were correct, how seriously had I compromised his son! and how fearfully the effects might redound upon myself! The valet was in the passage ready to open the front door: I longed to ask him if that old gentleman was indeed Sir Reginald Fortescue—but I dared not: it would seem too impertinent—or else would prove that I myself had good reasons for trembling at the idea. I accordingly restrained the curiosity that was devouring me, and hastily entered the hackney-coach,—bidding the driver take me home. I threw myself back in the vehicle, and continued my painful reflections. A thousand times in a few minutes did I ask myself whether that really could be Sir Reginald, or not? There was certainly no family likeness to guide me to a conclusion: indeed, my protector so little resembled the object of my alarm, that I gathered hope and encouragement from the circumstance, endeavouring to persuade

myself that my fears had deceived me.

At least half-an-hour elapsed while I was giving way to these conflicting thoughts; and during that interval I had not noticed which way the coach was proceeding. If I had looked forth from the window, it was only with the gaze of vacancy, and not to observe any passing objects. But now I suddenly perceived that I was in altogether a strange neighbourhood. The hackney-coach was proceeding along a narrow street, which I had never beheld before—or at least of which I had no recollection. What could this mean? Ah! the thought struck me that perhaps the driver was taking me by some short-cut towards Sloane Street, and that we were threading the district of Chelsea. Scarcely had this idea arisen in my mind, when it was followed by a reminiscence that startled me with terror. I had not sealed the envelope containing the two letters left for Reginald Fortescue! The entrance of that old gentleman had interrupted me at the very instant I was about to light the taper for the purpose. Good heaven! if he were indeed my protector's father he might peruse those letters, and he would thus obtain a complete knowledge of his son's connexion with me. Even if he were not Sir Reginald Fortescue, but merely a visitor, I nevertheless mistrusted him—he appeared to be inquisitive—and if he read the contents of that envelope, it was impossible to calculate what mischief might ensue. I was almost distract at my negligence in having left the packet unsealed—or indeed, under the circumstances, in having left it behind me at all. It was, however, too late to remedy the oversight.

Scarcely had I come to this conclusion when the coach stopped in the middle of a street narrower and more dingy than that which had previously struck my attention. I was now seriously alarmed, and was bewildered as to what it could all mean. The driver descended from his box: and at the same instant the door of the house opened, in front of which he had stopped. A woman about thirty, —pale, but not ill-looking, —dressed in a rusty black silk gown, a cap with faded pink ribbons—and altogether with a somewhat dirty appearance—came forth and said to the driver, "Is this Miss Lambert?"

"What do you require of me? what do you want?" I demanded quickly, as the coachman gave an affirmative response to the woman's question.

"It is not I who want you," she at once answered: "it is your brother Cyril, who is lying here at the point of death!"

"Cyril? good heavens!" were the words that burst from my lips, accompanied with a smothered shriek: and all recollection of the mysterious—nay, more, the suspicious manner in which I had been brought to this unknown place vanished from my mind. The image which instantaneously filled it was that of my unhappy brother lying on the bed of death. I sprang forth from the coach—I rushed into the house: the woman quickly led the way up a narrow staircase—and on the landing she stood aside, indicating an open door, and saying in a tone mournfully respectful, "There, Miss Lambert!"

I hurried forward: the door was instantaneously closed behind me—and in that room I found myself face to face with Horace Rockingham.

"Vile boy!" I exclaimed, now hurling at him as a taunt the word *boy*, which in other times I had been wont to apply to him in friendly familiarity: "what means this treachery? Let me go hence!"—and I was about to spring at him to hurl him away from barring my progress towards the door.

But with lightning swiftness he placed his back against it; and now I perceived that in each hand he held a pistol. I should add that this was a bed-chamber into which I had been thus inveigled,—indifferently furnished, with a few trumpery pictures hanging to the walls; and the aspect of the place conveyed an impression of grime and gloominess.

"Stand back, Rosa—and hear me!" said Horace Rockingham, speaking with accents of dogged desperate resolution, while his naturally beautiful countenance was pale and rigid with the same feeling.

"Not a word, sir! not a syllable vile boy, will listen to!" I exclaimed, my blood boiling with indignation. I know that you dare not use those weapons! Let me pass hence, or in another moment I will fly at you with the fury of a tigress!"

"Now, understand me well," interrupted Horace, actually levelling one of the pistols at me,—so that I shrank back in dismay.

"Lower it—for God's sake, lower it!" I cried, almost frenzied with alarm: "and I will listen to you! What do you require of me? wherefore have you had me brought hither?"

"Remain where you are—approach not an inch nearer," rejoined Rockingham: "or by heaven! I will do you a mischief!"—and as he thus spoke, he slowly lowered the pistol which he had

levelled at me: for he saw that I was transfixed in mortal terror to the spot where had bade me keep my stand. "Now listen—as you have agreed to do," he went on to say; "and do not excite yourself more than you can help—do not attempt to rush upon me—or by heaven! I will defend myself. Rosa," he continued, accentuating his words firmly and resolutely as he spoke, "you know there was a time when I loved you madly, and when I hesitated at nothing to gain possession of you. If circumstances had not thrown you into my arms, I do really believe that I should have committed the madness of marrying you—so invincible was the passion with which you had inspired me! When we parted in the evening of that day, I bade you write to me to appoint a time when you would meet me, that I might bear you away to the metropolis and possess you as wholly, solely mine. But you fled from Hawthorn: and the next I heard of you was that you were the mistress of another! You know all that passed between us at your abode in Jermyn Street, when you planted Lord Eveleigh in an adjacent room to overhear our discourse. Everything I told you then was strictly true: for I little suspected that there was a listener. I told you that I loved you still—I besought you to surrender yourself up to me—And it was true that I did love you—It is true that I love you still; and you shall be mine—you shall be mine! For that purpose have you been brought hither."

"Never, never!" I exclaimed, all my indignation suddenly boiling up again, and fed too by the growing impatience with which I had listened to my persecutor's speech. "Let me go

hence—or I will scream—I will raise the neighbourhood!"

"Beware how you force me to do something desperate," said Horace Rockingham: and again the pistol was deliberately levelled at me.

The execrable young man wore at the instant an expression of countenance so satanic in its admixture of sternest resolve and gloating passion, that I did indeed fear he was capable of something desperate. My indignation once more subsided rapidly into the direct alarm—my blood stagnated in my veins—and I murmured, "For God's sake, lower that weapon! An accident might stretch me lifeless at your feet!"

"Aye—and intentionally too, Rose," responded Horace, with a sardonic smile, "if you dare thwart my purpose. As for your screams, they will be unavailing here: for this is a house whence the din of disturbance frequently goes forth by day as well as by night; and the neighbours are too much accustomed as well as too indifferent to the sounds, to think of interfering."

While he was giving utterance to these words, a horrible, hideous, sickening suspicion stole into my mind—a suspicion of the loathsome revolting nature of the house to which I had been brought. I felt as if some disgusting plague had just seized upon me—as if I were contaminated by the mere circumstance of being within those walls.

"Execrable boy!" I cried, in a state bordering upon frenzy; "what place is this to which I have been so treacherously inveigled?"

"What place?" he cried with a sneer: "have you not already

guessed?" "were not my words significant enough?"

I staggered back with a faintness that came over me: I sank down upon a chair—and the tears gushed forth from my eyes.

"Now listen to me, once again, Rosa," resumed Horace; "and you will know precisely on what terms we stand towards each other. From my lips you have already learnt that I love you still,—love you with a maddening fervour—with a love indeed that will enable me to forget all your past vindictiveness, if for the present and the future you will be but complying and tender. Give your assent and to-morrow I convey you to splendidly furnished apartments, where we will dwell together—"

"No—no—I will die sooner!" I ejaculated, inspired with a sudden fury: and again I sprang up to my feet.

"Well, listen, then," continued Rockingham, a devilish expression once more coming upon his features, and giving him the appearance of that fearful beauty which painters and poets have represented as characterising the ruined angel;—"and you will see that your position is indeed a desperate one. You are in a house of infamy. The driver of the coach who brought you thither, is in my pay: he was bribed by me while you were at Captain Fortescue's lodgings, to perform the service which I required of him. If you refuse the terms I proffer, you may in a short time—within another half-hour perhaps—issue hence. You will then have been here long enough to afford corroboration to the tale which will be told of you. Interrupt me not!—you must learn what the nature of that tale will be. An anonymous letter—"

"Detestable youth!" I ejaculated, shivering with rage, the very fierceness of which rendered me impotent for energetic action: "you are indeed an adept at anonymous letters, which are the resources of the dastard and the coward—the weapons of the bravo-like maligner!"

Granting that I am this adept with those weapons, Rose, responded Horace, coolly, "you ought to admit to yourself that I am not a man to be trifled with. But let me finish what I had to say, so that you may know precisely how you stand towards me. An anonymous letter, as I was observing, will be despatched to Reginald Fortescue, informing him that you accompanied me, Horace Rockingham, to a house of a particular description."

"Wretch—fiend!" I exclaimed: "think you for a moment that the vile tale will be believed?"

"Believed? Certainly?" cried Rockingham, with a triumphant laugh: "believed as firmly as you are now believed that your protector was in the arms of a rival. For jealousy believes anything!"

"Ah! then, miscreant that you are," I interjected furiously, "you admit the authorship of that foul calumny against Captain Fortescue."

"Wherefore should I deny it?" asked Horace, his countenance lighting up with a triumphant look and luxurious smile, as his eyes devoured me: "I had a purpose to serve—and I succeeded. I knew that on the receipt of that letter you would fly to your protector's lodgings: I knew also that you would not find him there. I calculated that your mind would be in such trouble on coming forth again, that you would not notice in which direction the driver of the coach took you. As I

have already said, an understanding was promptly entered into with him—for I was on the watch in Pall Mall; and having given him my gold and my instruction, I hurried hither, confident that I should not have to wait long ere you would be at the same destination. Now, Rose, is one who thus coolly combines, and calculates, and lays his plans, likely to be baffled in the triumphant carrying out of all his aims."

"That you are vile and wicked enough for anything, I know, sir. Alas, I know it to my cost!" was my bitter exclamation. "But let me go hence!" I added with passionate vehemence and I advanced towards him.

"Stop! stand back!" he cried, now levelling both pistols at me. "Hear me out—and in two minutes more the door shall be open for you, if you chose to avail yourself of the freedom thus afforded."

"Go on, go on!—be quick!" I ejaculated. "What more have you to say?"

"Now that I have kept you a sufficient time here to answer my purpose," he resumed, with that bitter mocking laugh which sounded like the mirth of a fiend, "it is no longer necessary to use intimidation. There! and there!" he added, tossing one pistol after the other upon the bed: "away with the really useless weapons! I have frightened you desperately. Rose: but they were not loaded. Much as I love you—much as I burn to possess you wholly and solely—I am nevertheless not not quite so infatuated as to swing for you on the gibbet. One word more—and then you shall give me your decision. By aid of those pistols I have kept you here for three-quarters of an hour:"—and he coolly looked at his watch

as he still leant with his back against the door. "The anonymous letter to which I have alluded, will inform Captain Fortescue that you voluntarily accompanied me to this place. You may deny the tale as you will—you may talk of treachery—you may vow and protest—you may weep and wail—you may play off all your woman's airs—hysterics, frenzy, raving, shrieks, faintings, and, so forth: but rest assured that Fortescue will investigate the matter! Then he will find every corroboration. The woman of this house will repeat with accuracy the tale that I shall put in her mouth—a tale that will be told with an off-hand business like ingenuousness, and will prove that you were lovingly complying. But that is not all! The driver of the coach will tell *his* tale with equal fidelity to my interest—to the effect that I joined you at a certain spot, whence we repaired hither. Now, Rose, will you court all that shame and degradation? will you brand yourself with all that crowning infamy?—or will you, on the other hand, comply with my terms?"

Again I sank like one annihilated upon the chair: my brain was whirling in confusion,—the only lucid idea being that I was utterly enmeshed in the most inextricable web that ever the devilish ingenuity of a fiend in human shape had woven for the complete destruction of a fellow-creature. But, ah! a thought struck me. It flashed in unto my mind through the misty confusion of my brain, as the lightning darts in a moment through the murky clouds. It was a last hope—but was clutched at with the avidity which the drowning wretch displays when grasping at

a straw: it was suggestive that I might perhaps be in possession of a talisman which in a single moment would change the whole aspect of the scene.

"Mr. Rockingham," I said, slowly rising from my seat and addressing him in a firm cold voice, "If you only laboured one quarter as much to perform good actions as you toil to consummate evil ones, you would be one of the sublimes characters on the face of the earth. But Satan has placed you upon this earth, to work out his own infernal purposes. You threaten me with ruin if I refuse compliance with your demands? Well, be it so. Sooner will I dare everything—sooner will I risk everything than succumb once more to your treacheries!"

"Mark well, Rose—it is either love or vengeance!" interrupted Horace. "Either love of that fervid passionate nature as I alone can understand it: or else vengeance of that implacable character as only I can wreak it!"—and his eyes burnt with that terrific expression which I have particularly noticed in the opening chapter of my narrative.

"Let it be revenge, sir, if you will," I answered, still coldly and firmly: "for rest assured that never will I court such love as yours. No: the embrace of a reptile were infinitely preferable! But remember, sir, that you will not stand alone in the wreaking of revenge:"—and now I trembled with a fearful suspense as to the success of the talisman which I was about to apply in the hope of changing the aspect of the present scene. "You, on your side, will do all you can to parade me as a being sunken down into the lowest pollutions:—I, on my

part, will parade your father as a ruined man!"

"Rose!"—and Horace Rockingham started—nay, actually bounded a foot from the floor, as if the most powerful electric shock had suddenly been applied to his very feet.

"Yes!" I ejaculated, the thrill of ineffable delight and glorious triumph sweeping through my entire frame, as I was thus in a moment relieved from all uncertainty as to the talismanic power of the secret which the adventures of the masquerade had put into my possession: "I will tell the word that though Mr. Rockingham, senior, may still maintain the appearance of a rich man, he is in reality a ruined one—that fatal speculations have swept away his colossal fortune—and that with tears in his eyes, six weeks back, he confessed to his son the frightful condition of his affairs!"

My triumph, my joy, and my vindictive delight experienced not the least abatement—but on the contrary, were enhanced by the effect produced on Horace Rockingham by these words. For a moment his eyes flashed upon me with that terrific power which I have before described: then the light seemed suddenly to die in their depths, like burning cinders which go out all in an instant as water is thrown upon them. His countenance became as pale as death—a fearful agitation convulsed him visibly—he would have fallen, I verily believe, if he had not been leaning against the door on which he had sunk back after that galvanic spring upward when the power of the talisman was first applied to him.

"Now, sir," I said, with the confidence of one whose turn it

was to command, "how stand we in reference to each other?"

"It is for you to dictate conditions, Rose," responded Horace, in a faint, half-dying voice: "and I who ere now dictated them, must submit!"

"No doubt of it!" I immediately added: then in an imperious tone, I exclaimed, "Stand away from that door!"

He at once obeyed: but with a sudden start he instantaneously observed, "I understand it all! The masquerade!"

"Yes—you are right," I answered. "I was indeed there; and it was to me, Horace Rockingham, that you addressed yourself in the dark avenue, when you thought you were speaking to another."

"Good God! the coincidence! the accident! it is astounding!" and as he thus spoke, his looks expressed the bewildering wonderment to which he had given verbal utterance.

"Summon hither," I said, "the woman of the house."

He called forth the name of Mrs. Simpson from the top of the stairs; and the female in the black silk dress and the cap with pink ribbons, forthwith made her appearance. The sight of the wretch filled me with an ineffable loathing; and I stepped back a pace or two as she entered the room—for her very breath seemed to carry contamination upon it.

"I have been inveigled hither," I said, "by the most execrable treachery, in which you have borne a certain part. This unprincipled young man"—and I glanced with scornful indignation towards Horace Rockingham—"will tell you that I have not succumbed to his designs upon me; and he will in your presence beseech my par-

don for the outrage. Do you not, sir?"

"I do, I do," replied Horace, utterly discomfited and crestfallen.

"Then beware infamous woman that you are!" I continued, "how you venture to breathe a single syllable to my detriment. On the condition of your good behaviour in this respect, depends my forbearance from invoking the powers of the law to punish you. And now answer me: is that hackney-coach still at the door?"

"No, ma'am," replied Mrs. Simpson, very much alarmed, and glancing in consternation from me towards Horace—then back again to myself. "It has departed."

"Enough!" I exclaimed: and turning towards Rockingham, I said, "It is for you, sir, to see the driver of that vehicle to-morrow—or this very evening,—and bid *him* keep silence also in respect to this outrage:"—then, as I now perceived the woman had descended the stairs again, I added, "There is one other point on which I command silence; and that is with respect to my presence at the masquerade at Lady Sudbury's house. Remember that if in one single title my injunctions are disobeyed, the world shall that instant know of your father's ruined fortunes. Henceforth leave me alone, and all connected with me: it is the only condition on which I will spare your father and yourself."

"And may I really hope, Rosa," asked Horace, in the most self-abasing entreaty, "that you will keep this secret?"

"I will—on the terms that I have stipulated. Be you equally faithful and guarded on your side."

I then issued from the room, and descended the stairs. The

door of the house stood open: I passed forth as quickly as possible, and shrinking as it were within myself like a guilty thing,—feeling indeed as if the eyes of the whole world were upon me. I looked neither to the right nor to the left—but sped along, and did not relax my pace, nor even pause to reflect or to inquire in what quarter of the town I was, until. I had threaded three or four streets. Then I began to breathe more freely: it seemed as if I had entered into a purer atmosphere, and had escaped from the range of those eyes which might have seen me issue forth from that house of infamy.

I looked at my watch: it was a little past six o'clock; and being in the month of August, was still broad day-light. In a few moments I emerged into asquare; and looking up to read the name on the corner house, I found it was Fitzroy Square. I now knew the district to which I had been taken, and had no difficulty in reaching the nearest stand of public vehicles,—where I entered one, and in due time reached my own house in Sloane Street.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BRIDGE

On arriving at home I experienced all the effects of the terrible excitement through which I had passed for the previous four or five hours. Indeed, I was exceedingly indisposed; and was half inclined to send for a medical man—only that I knew not exactly what explanation to give him, so as to account for the nervous trepidation into which I had been thrown. I forced myself to eat a few mouthfuls of the dinner

that was served up; and I drank a glass or two of wine,—after which refreshment I felt somewhat better.

I lay upon the sofa to reflect whether I should frankly explain to Reginald Fortescue everything that had occurred between Horace Rockingham and myself: or whether I should keep the whole iniquitous affair profoundly secret. I decided upon the latter course, for several reasons. In the first place, I knew that Fortescue's brave and impetuous character would prompt him at once to hasten off and inflict upon Horace a chastisement which would inevitably provoke a hostile meeting and I shuddered at the idea of my protector being involved in a second duel on my account. Another motive for my resolve of silence, was my conviction that Horace Rockingham himself would keep the matter secret; as it was evident that he was even far more horrified at the bare thought to his father's circumstances being made public, than I had at first expected he would be. Thus, if there was no chance of the occurrences reaching Reginald Fortescue's ears, it would be useless to afflict him and perhaps to endanger his life by making the revelation. Moreover, he might possibly think that a certain degree of blame was to be attached to myself in having so unguardedly fallen into the treacherous snare laid for me; and what was worse still—his sensibilities might be deeply wounded by the bare thought that I had been in a house of an infamous description. I knew full well that if the delicacy of sentiment which enters into the contexture of love be once hurt, warped, or blunted, the feeling of love itself becomes undermined and its very existence

endangered. Therefore, all things considered, I determined to keep the seal of silence upon my lips in respect to those incidents which have occupied so large a portion of the preceding chapter. On the following morning I looked anxiously for the arrival of Reginald Fortescue; and as the hour drew near when I was aware he would come off guard, my heart began to palpitate with increasing violence. That he would forgive me for my jealous fears and for the proceeding which they had prompted, I had no doubt; but I trembled with the apprehension that the old gentleman I had seen at his lodgings, might after all prove to be his father—that he had read the letters I had left unsealed—that he would thence have gleaned the secret of his son's connexion with me—and that he would take measures to put an end to it. These were the alarms which harassed me; and when I heard, at about noon, Reginald's well-known knock at the front-door, I felt as if all my happiness now depended on the cast of a die.

He came bounding up the staircase in his wonted hurried manner when anxious to see me after an entire day's separation; the door opened—and I rushed into his arms. He strained me to his breast lavishing the tenderest caresses upon me: and thus did I know that I was indeed forgiven for my jealousy and its consequences. But still the apprehension in respect to that old gentleman remained; and when my emotions allowed me the power of utterance, I hurriedly and excitedly questioned him upon the point.

"Yes, dearest Rose," answered Reginald, as we sat down together, his arm thrown round my waist and my hand locked in his:

"your conjecture is the true one—it was my father that you saw."

"Your father!" I murmured in a dying voice. "And he will separate us?"

"Tranquillise yourself, beloved girl," rejoined Fortescue quickly: "it would be difficult—nay, impossible for him to do this. In respect to your visit to my lodgings, I will not reproach you for an instant. The letter—that wicked, malicious, execrable letter which you inclosed for me—was indeed enough to provoke your jealousy: but as you yourself, in your own dear letter, suggested, I regard that jealousy as a proof of the love which you bear for me."

I embraced my protector tenderly: I felt deeply grateful to him for thus abstaining from reproach at that instant: I loved him, if possible, more than ever; and tears of joy trickled down my cheeks as I reflected upon the assurance he had just given me that we should not be parted.

"Tell me everything, dearest Reginald," I said; "so that I may know exactly how you are situated in respect to your father. Did he read the letters which, by a fatal oversight, I felt unsealed? Yes—I am confident that he did!"

"Again is your conjecture right," responded Fortescue: "my father did read those letters. But he would not have done it—he is too honourable and high-minded to pray into the secrets of his own son, were it not that something had occurred to afford him a previous insight into my position with regard to you. For the detestable system of anonymous writing has not been applied to you alone, Rose: it has taken wider ramifications—and the raiforous hand of our unknown

enemy despatched one of those coward epistles to my father in the north of England."

"Ah!" I ejaculated, with a sudden start of fierce indignation, as I of course instantaneously knew that this was another phase in Horace Rookingham's detestable machinations.

"Yes," continued, Reginald not for an instant suspecting the real meaning of that ejaculation nor of that start; "an anonymous my father to understand that I letter gave was ruining myself for a beautiful syren: "and the old gentleman at once came up to London to investigate the truth of the matter."

"And the unfortunate step which I took," I observed regretfully "threw me at the very instant in his way!"

"Do not blame yourself, dearest Rose—for I blame you not!" answered Reginald. "It is true that the governor, on hearing from my valet that a lady was up-stairs, had his already excited suspicions at once strengthened—and he was determined to see who the lady was. From the confusion of your manner—"

"Yes—I *was* confused, Reginald," I interrupted him mournfully; "because I felt that I had done wrong to visit your lodgings,"

"Dearest girl, pray cease to reproach yourself: I am only telling you what my father thought, as he has ere now explained everything to me. He witnessed your confusion as I was saying; and it struck him that you might be the very lady concerning whom the anonymous letter was written. He would have perhaps questioned you farther; but you intimated that you had left a letter for me—and he therefore knew that this would afford him

all the information he sought. He read the two enclosures you had left. He did not seek me at the guardhouse—he did not even send to inform me that he was in London: he remained at my lodgings until this morning—when I returned thither. Conceive my astonishment on finding him there, and on learning that you had called yesterday! My father remonstrated with me gently but firmly: I promised everything, with the intention of fulfilling nothing; and to-morrow he will leave London again.”

“Reginald”, I observed, in a deep and low murmuring voice, “you must not for my sake fly in the face of your father!”

“Good heavens, Rose!” exclaimed my protector; do you think that I would consent to a separation? No—not for worlds! Let me hear nothing more of this kind from your lips; or I must silence you thus:”—and he imprinted a long, tender kiss upon my mouth. “No—dear girl,” he went on to observe, “I am not quite a child to be thus ruled by the governor. To set his mind at rest, and induce him to leave London all the more speedily, I of course promised everything. All we have to do is to be as guarded as possible—But if I thought that Mrs. Harborough was the authoress of these anonymous letters,” he suddenly ejaculated, “I would take some means to punish the vile woman!”

“I do not for a moment think anything of the sort,” was my observation, quickly uttered: for though liking Mrs. Harborough as little as could be, I did not choose her to bear the brunt of a fault which she had not committed. “Mr. Alvanly had similar letters sent to him, which provoked a quarrel between us:

for he suspected me unjustly—and indeed was subsequently forced to admit that he had been misled.”

“Persons too often have their unknown enemies,” remarked Reginald; “and if it be not Mrs. Harborough in this case—as from what you have told me it would seem that it is not—it is doubtless some cowardly scoundrel who is jealous of my happiness in possessing you. However, we will not allow these circumstances to trouble us any more. And remember, dearest Rose, that should anonymous letters reach either of us in future, we will at once show them to each other, and trust to explanations to remove every jealous alarm.”

“Rest assured, my generous Reginald,” I exclaimed, flinging my arms round his neck, “that I shall never more be so foolish in respect to you as I yesterday was!”

A fortnight passed away after the incidents which I have been relating: and one morning, on sending to the post-office in Cavenish Street to inquire for letters, I received the long expected one from Lady Lucia Calthorpe. She therein observed that I must doubtless feel astonished she had not previously communicated with me, if only to renew in writing the gratitude which she had expressed at our interview in Hyde Park: but she assured me that she had trembled at the bare idea of taking a single step which would tend to excite any suspicion; and that she was so fearful of a letter falling into other hands than those for whom it might be intended. She requested me to meet her on the following day, at the same place and at the same hour as before,—when we might converse together upon the sub-

ject in respect to which she dared write no more. She concluded with renewed expressions of her grateful feelings towards me, and with the assurance that she held herself under an obligation which she could never hope to repay. The letter bore merely the initial "L," and was addressed from no place of abode.

On the ensuing day, at the appointed hour, I proceeded on foot to the spot where I was to meet her, and which was at no considerable distance from my own house: indeed, I may as well observe for the benefit of those readers who are unacquainted with the great metropolis, that Sloane Street is in the immediate vicinage of Hyde Park. I was not kept many minutes waiting, Lady Lucia soon accosting me: she was dressed plainly and unobtrusively, as on the former occasion. She was closely veiled; and, as a matter of course, she came on foot. From her appearance it would have been scarcely possible to suspect that she was in a way to become a mother: indeed, if I had not previously known it, I am convinced that such an idea would not have occurred to me. But she was tall—rather inclined to embonpoint—and thus, with these physical advantages, aided by the artificialities of the toilet, she was enabled to conceal her position. Yet she was within a month of the time at which she expected her confinement to take place: namely, at the close of September. She shook me warmly by the hand—poured forth the most fervid expressions of gratitude—and altogether displayed so much feeling that I thought I must have judged her erroneously to some extent, when, after the previous interview. I had come to

the conclusion that she was naturally cold, callous, and apathetic.

"The time approaches, my dear Mrs. Wilton," she said, "when I must avail myself of your generously promised succour. It will be impossible for me to conceal my position many days longer: I need hardly inform you that it is to the danger of my very life I have hitherto succeeded in veiling it."

"And your maid," I asked: "has your ladyship made her your confidante?"

"Yes—Maria is in my confidence," responded Lucia. "She is a woman of about eight-and-twenty—discreet and reserved—faithful too, I am convinced. Ah! you may conceive how deep was my humiliation when I had to confess my secret to her!—but she told me that for some weeks previously she had suspected it, and yet had scarcely dared harbour the thought which nevertheless amounted almost to a conviction in her own mind. I told her of the frightful outrage to which I had been subjected: she was shocked and painfully affected: embraced me, declaring that she would go through fire and water to serve me. I told her that heaven had sent me a friend in you, my dear Mrs. Wilton; and she was infinitely rejoiced at this announcement. At present I am staying with my aunt the Marchioness of Sudbury. My father and mother, brothers and sister, are all upon the Continent; and this is indeed most fortunate. I managed to induce my aunt to give me a pressing invitation to remain with her for a few weeks and thus my family did not think it at all strange that I should remain in England. In a word, my secret is unsuspected where

suspicion was to be so much dreaded;—and now it remains for me to pass through the final ordeal."

The unhappy young lady's voice sank into the profoundest melancholy as she gave utterance to these last words: a half-stifled sob too fell upon my ear; and even through the veil, which she kept down, I could see the tears glistening in her eyes.

"Keep up your spirits, dear Lady Lucia," I said; "and every thing shall be done for the best. I have a plan settled in my head; and this absence of your family from England is most fortunate—inasmuch as there is but one person now to deceive, instead of half-a-dozen to be similarly dealt with."

"And that one person is my aunt, the Marchioness?" observed Lady Lucia inquiringly.

"Exactly so," I rejoined. "Is her ladyship very particular? does she keep a close watch over you? Think you that it will be easy or difficult for you to leave her for six weeks or so, if a very excellent pretext be devised for such absence?"

"My aunt has a great idea of the strictest propriety, reserve, and bashfulness being maintained by young ladies," answered Lucia: "But having not the slightest reason to suspect me of duplicity or double-dealing, she would no doubt be blinded by any sufficient pretext; if it be possible to invent one?"

"Oh! the pretext," I exclaimed, "is readily planned. Indeed, I have thought over it—I have pondered it well—I have considered it in all its bearings during the two months which have elapsed since last we met. Tell me, Lady Lucia, at what boarding-school were you educated?"

"At Mrs. Arlington's at Bath," was the young lady's response.

"Very good," I went on to observe. "Then at Mrs. Arlington's your most intimate school companion was a certain Catherine Rivers—or any other name that may suit your purpose better. But be it Catherine Rivers. Well, this Catherine Rivers has grown up, like yourself—and has married a gentleman high in the service of the East India Company. She is now Mrs. Wiltón. Her husband is in India—she remains in England on account of her health—and she has a beautiful little place some thirty or forty miles from London; or at least so far that the Marchioness of Sudbury shall not be inclined to take it into her head some fine morning to drive over there to see her niece. Now, do you begin to comprehend me? I write you a letter from this beautiful place of mine—which, be it understood, has yet to be taken: I remind you of our former friendship—I recall to your recollection the intimacy which subsisted between us at school—I recapitulate the vows and promises we exchanged, to the effect that this friendship should last for life: I throw in a few good-humouredly satirical allusions to Mrs. Arlington and the teachers—will perhaps a harder rap at the French governess or the drawing-master. In short, I make my letter as natural as possible, and give it such assemblance of truth that when you hand it to the Marchioness to read, she shall not for an instant suspect it is otherwise than completely genuine. Of course I give you a most pressing invitation to come and pass a few weeks with me at my beautiful place; and thus, you see, dear Lady Lucia, all that remains for you to do is

to persuade your aunt the Marchioness of Sudbury to permit you to pay the visit to your old school-fellow."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Wilton!" exclaimed Lady Lucia, "how can I sufficiently thank you for all your kindness? So much forethought and ingenuity added to so much generosity!—and you a stranger too to have taken such compassion upon me! Oh, I have no doubt that my aunt the Marchioness will be completely deceived by such a letter as that which you propose to write. But you have yet the country-house to take and all this will occupy time!"

"Not a moment shall be lost, dear Lady Lucia," I answered. "I waited but for your summons to bring us together; and pardon me for observing that it is your own fault if the matter is driven off to the last instant. However, now that you consent to my plan, I will see about the requisite arrangements at once. There are house agents in London who have upon their books such a country-residence as will suit—small but comfortable, and ready furnished. Then I will go and see it; and while at the place, will write you the promised letter so that it may bear the local postmark, and thus have the most genuine appearance in every detail."

"My dear friend," said Lady Lucia, in a voice that was mournful as well as hesitating and indicative of embarrassment, "all that you propose to do will cost a great deal of money; and I am forced to confess humiliating though it be, that I cannot dispose of sufficient funds of my own for the purpose. As for applying to my aunt, she would wonder wherefore I could possibly need such an amount."

"Place yourself at ease upon this point," I said: I have ample resources, which you may command; and you can easily repay me at some future period according to your convenience:" for I added these words in order to save Lady Lucia from as much humiliation as possible, and put the advances I was about to make in the light of a loan instead of a gift.

She again expressed her gratitude, pressing my hand fervently, vowing that she should never forget my goodness—and calling me her angel-saviour. We then separated; and I proceeded at once to a house-agent whose office was at no great distance from my residence. This person had recently distributed circulars throughout the neighbourhood, directing attention to his business; and I had carefully studied the details of that prospectus, because at the time I had already formed my plan on Lady Lucia's behalf. I explained my requirement to the house-agent: namely, a small but genteel and comfortably furnished country-dwelling at least forty miles from London, and to be taken only for a term of three months.

"I think," said Mr. Perkins the house-agent, "that I can accommodate you:"—and having looked over his book, he went on to observe, "Here is the very thing: A neat cottage-residence, situated in the midst of a large garden—genteelly furnished—and with every convenience. The family has gone abroad for sometime, and has left me discretionary power in the letting of the place. An elderly couple are in charge of it,—the man serving as the gardener, the woman as cook and servant-of-all-work. There are parlour and dining-room—four bed-rooms

—kitchen—outhouse—and so forth. The rent, is marked at fifty pounds a-year: and therefore I think that for a term of three months you will not object, ma'am, to pay fifteen guineas?"

"Certainly not," I answered; "and you shall have the amount in advance. But you have omitted to tell me where the residence is situated."

"Ah! to be sure!" ejaculated the house-agent. "It is on the outskirts of Sittingbourne—a town in Kent, on the high road between Rochester and Canterbury. And when I bethink me, it is exactly forty miles from London—neither more nor less. When do you wish to take possession?"

"I will go and see it to-morrow," was my response; "and if its appearance be according to your description, I will close with you at once on my return. Here are a couple of guineas as an earnest; and if I do not take the premises, this little fee shall be your own."

The house-agent was satisfied; and inquired what name he should write upon the card that would have to be presented to the old people in charge of the house, which he informed me was called Jasmine Cottage. I bade him write the name of Mrs. Witton; for it was indeed a matter of perfect indifference whether or not he subsequently discovered that it was not my right name. The business was finished, and I returned home.

It was my resolution to depart the first thing in the morning for Sittingbourne: but I knew not exactly what excuse to make to Reginald Fortescue for this journey, which would keep me two days absent. I had embarked heart and soul in the enterprise on Lady Lucia's account: and I was determined to keep her secret

inviolable. Therefore, I could neither mention her name nor say anything that might afford the least clue to the purpose which I had in hand. I could not very well pretend that I had received an invitation from any female friend to pay her a visit, because, if so, Reginald would think it strange that I did not, in the spirit of confidence, show him the letter. But an idea struck me. It would be unkind towards Lady Lucia to do things by halves, and leave her to find her way alone to the temporary residence that was to be taken for her. I therefore resolved to wait at Sittingbourne until her arrival. This would occasion a prolonged absence from London: but the prolonged absence itself suggested a befitting excuse to be made to Reginald. I had told him that my parents dwelt in Cheshire: I could now intimate to him that it was my desire to pay them a visit. I knew that he would remonstrate: I was sorry to deceive him: but I had undertaken something from which I could not now retreat—and the best must now be made of it.

He came at the dinner-hour; and in the course of the evening, I stated that, with his concurrence I proposed to set off on the morrow to visit my parents. He was seized with consternation and alarm. I had never entered into any family matters with him; and he naturally thought that if I once returned to my parents, they would do their best to keep me altogether with them. I however succeeded in quitting his fears, by solemnly assuring him that I would return at the expiration of a week—and likewise by hinting that my parents believed me to be otherwise situated than what I really was. To be brief, he assented: but the evening we passed

together was a dull and gloomy one, notwithstanding all my endeavours to rally my own spirits and cheer those of my lover.

On the following morning, Reginald waited to see me off in the post-chaise that was ordered for my accommodation. He had wished Frances, my maid, to accompany me: but I hinted that this was impossible, as the mere fact of my being so attended would prove to my parents that I had deceived them as to my actual position. Reginald was satisfied: we embraced each other—I entered the vehicle—and it drove rapidly away. But the instructions given to the postillion by Captain Fortescue, were of course calculated to make him take a road which I had not the slightest intention of pursuing. I was therefore compelled to call to him to stop so soon as we were at a suitable distance from the house; and when I gave him counter-instructions, he stared in astonishment. A guinea however soon rendered the man satisfied; and proceeding in the direction of Westminster Bridge, he urged his horses on towards the Kent Road.

It was a little past one o'clock in the afternoon that the post-chaise entered the town of Sittingbourne, and stopped at the principal inn. This town, containing about a couple of a thousand inhabitants, lies upon the high road from London to Dover: indeed the road itself constitutes the principal street. Alighting at the inn, and having partaken of some refreshment, I inquired my way to Jasmine Cottage: and speedily reached it. Its outward appearance, being neat and picturesque, fully justified the description given by the house-agent. It was situated on that outskirt of the town which is nearest to Canterbury;

and stood back about thirty yards from the road,—having a large garden attached. An old man, whom I found to be exceedingly deaf, was working in this garden; and when I displayed the card, he conducted me into the cottage, where I found his wife—a respectable, cleanly female, whose age bordered upon sixty. Her manners were respectful and agreeable; and I judged her to be obliging, as well as discreet, and devoid of impertinent curiosity. She showed me over the house, the interior of which was in all respects as the agent had described it. I accordingly informed the old couple—whose name was Bunting—that I should take the cottage, and that by the same day's post I would write to Mr. Perkins to remit the money and close the bargain. The Buntings themselves had the power of letting it as well as the London agent; and there was consequently one difficulty in my taking immediate possession. I lost no time in writing two letters,—one to Perkins, enclosing the sum due for the three months' tenure—and the other to Lucia. This letter was a very long one, and was couched in precisely the terms which I had explained to her at our last interview. I took the letters to the post myself; as of course I did not wish the Buntings to read the address on the one written to Lady Lucia Calthorpe.

On the following day I informed the woman that I had taken the cottage for a Mrs. Richards—a friend of mine—who was coming thither to pass through her confinement. I devised some tale about her husband being abroad, and the London physicians having ordered seclusion as well as change of air; and I was pleased to discover that my first

estimate of Mrs. Bunting's character was a correct one; for she exhibited no impertinent curiosity—while, at the same time, she evidently put implicit faith in whatsoever I told her. I allowed her to make all requisite purchases—was lavish with the money I placed in her hands—and not over rigid in examining her account; and though I found her scrupulously honest, yet the confidence. I appeared to be so ingenuously reposing in her evidently flattered and pleased the old woman.

The return of post brought no letter from Lady Lucia—a circumstance at which I was both astonished and alarmed. I thought that in any case—even supposing her aunt would not permit her to accept my invitation—she would have been sure to write. Indeed I knew not what to think—but encouraged myself with the idea that the following morning's post could not fail to bring me an answer. During the day I caused everything to be purchased which I believed circulated to administer to the comforts of Lady Lucia: I still acted as if they were no doubt as to her making her appearance—for I did not wish her to come and find the place unprepared for her reception.

I was sitting in the parlour between nine and ten o'clock in the evening, endeavouring to beguile my loneliness—and I may even add, the melancholy which it inspired—when the sounds of an equipage stopping at the garden-gate, reached my ears. It was a beautiful evening; and I hurried forth to welcome Lady Lucia—for she I felt assured it must be. And Lady Lucia it was—who, attended by her maid, had arrived in a post-chaise. She wore a thick veil, which she kept over her countenance as I assisted her to

alight from the vehicle; nor did she raise that veil as she threw herself into my arms. Her maid lingered behind to pay the postilion; while I conducted Lucia into the parlour—Mrs. Bunting following, to receive any instructions which the presence of my expected friend might render necessary.

"Get supper ready," I said, "with the least possible delay: for *Mrs. Richards*." I added, emphasizing the name, so as at once to make Lucia aware of the denomination I had selected for her, "doubtless needs refreshment after her journey."

"Now, my dear friend," she said hastily, and trembling all over with nervous excitement as she literally clung to my arm, "nothing but some tea—and that I will take in my bed-room. Pray conduct me up to it at once?"

Mrs. Bunting hurried off to the kitchen to make the tea, and Lucia, without offering to lift her veil, followed me up to the best bed-chamber, which I had caused to be prepared for her reception. Then having closed and locked the door, she lifted her veil—again embraced me, pouring forth her gratitude in the most fervid strain. She next proceeded to take off her bonnet and shawl; and in a hurried and excited manner, asked, "How many domestics are there in the place?"

"Only the elderly woman whom you have seen—and her husband, who acts as gardener, I knew that you purposed to bring your maid; and I thought that no other servant would be necessary."

"Excellent!" ejaculated Lucia, with an air of considerable relief, "But that woman—"

"Discreet—trustworthy—and without the slightest impertinent curiosity," I responded.

"Nothing can be better!" said Lucia, still farther relieved. "I have given Maria the fullest instructions how to act; and I must trust to you, my dear friend, to tell some tale to that old couple, so that they will not think my conduct extraordinary—or at all events, whatever they may think they will not go gossiping about it."

"But, my dear Lady Lucia—No! I must call you Mrs. Richards, even when we are alone together, for fear of in an-advertent mention of your real name in the presence of the Buntings."

"Oh, but I never mean to have them in my presence!" at once exclaimed Lady Lucia, "I have told Maria that she is to bring me up all my meal—"

"That of course she can do," I answered, "if you do not choose to be served in the parlour."

"Not for worlds!" cried Lucia. "you do not think, my dear Mrs. Wilton, that I would let the people of the house see my face. Good heavens, no!"

I now comprehended wherefore the veil had been so scrupulously kept down—and why Lucia had locked the door.

"But, my dear friend," I said "you will have to remain here a couple of months; and during that interval it is altogether impossible you can bury yourself in your bed-chamber."

"Is there much of a garden to the house?" inquired her ladyship: "I mean at the back of it—and which is not overlooked by other dwellings?"

"Yes—a large garden, surrounded by a very high hedge, and in no way overlooked."

"Then I can occasionally take exercise there, of an evening, with my veil on."

"But this conduct on your part," I suggested, "will only excite the very suspicious which you ought to be so anxious to avoid."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lucia, who appeared to have every detail of her conduct during her sojourn at Jasmine Cottage marked out and settled beforehand; it is by far better to risk suspicion and conjecture—which, after all, can only be of the vaguest and dimmest quality—than to incur positive dangers by letting my face be seen, thereby standing the chance of future recognition."

"You certainly shall have your own way in everything," I answered: "but when the crisis comes—the medical attendant—"

"I shall be veiled, and the room shall be darkened," was Lady Lucia's quick and ready response. "Ah my dear friend!" she added, in an excited manner, "pray do not endeavour to after my plans! I should never be enabled to go forth into the world again, if I stood the chance of being recognised by those who could point a finger at me. Maria is trustworthy—you would not betray me—and the villain Rockingham is not likely to make a boast of his fiendish atrocity:—these last words being uttered with a deep concentrated bitterness, so that it was evident enough the young lady entertained not one particle of love—but, on the contrary, a burning, rancorous hate, towards the father of the babe which she bore in her bosom."

"I again assure you, my dear Mrs. Richards," I said, "that everything shall be conducted and arranged just as you think fit. I am here to help, and not to coerce you to befriend, and not to grieve or annoy. But I scarcely expected you to-night. How was it that

you did not favour me with a single line——”

“Oh, my dear friend!” cried Lucia, embracing me: “pray forgive that seeming neglect—do not think me ungrateful—make allowances for the dreadful excitement, the torture and anguish of mind, which I have undergone!”

“I do, I do! No apologies are necessary. Had you any difficulty.” I asked, “in persuading your aunt to allow you to accept the invitation?”

“None at all,” responded Lucia, “Your letter was so admirable! Nothing could be more graphic than the style in which you recalled to mind those feigned schoolday reminiscences. Really you possess great talent: you ought to write a novel.”

“At all events,” I observed, not thinking the compliment a very delicate nor considerate one, “I plunged headlong into that tissue of fabrications for your sake.”

“Heavens! do not take offence, my dear friend,” cried Lucia earnestly, as she seized my hand in both her own. “I did not mean to say anything unkind or unfeeling. I know you have done much for me—far more than I can ever repay!”

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and Lucia, hastily snatching up her veil, threw it over her head, exclaiming in affright, “Oh, if that should not be Maria!”

“I will see:”—and I hastened to open the door: but it was Maria, bearing the tea-tray, with which she entered. She was, as Lady Lucia had described her, a woman of about eight-and-twenty, and with the appearance of discretion and reserve. She was by no means good-looking, but genteel and dressed with great neatness. She gazed somewhat hard at me

for a moment—no doubt to discover whether I also was trustworthy, and whether by my looks I might be taken as a real friend of her mistress. She was apparently satisfied on these points, and spoke most civilly when I had occasion to say something to her. I had made up my mind to stay three more days at Jasmine Cottage, for two reasons: in the first place that Lucia might not be consigned to a too sudden loneliness after her arrival there—and in the second place, that I might prolong my absence from London sufficiently to keep Reginald in the belief that I had really been into Cheshire to see my parents.

For the three clear days that I thus remained at the cottage after Lucia's arrival, she pursued the exact line of conduct which she had previously marked out. She took all her meals in her bedroom, the door of which she kept locked—only opening it on recognising the voice of either myself or her maid. In the evening, when it was quite dusk, she put on a thick veil and walked for an hour in the garden, but keeping the while entirely in the shade of the high hedge which enclosed the rearward end of the grounds. I took an opportunity to hint to Mrs. Bunting that my friend Mrs. Richards had her peculiarities; but I begged the good woman to humour them as much as possible. With much evident sincerity, she expressed her willingness to do so—adding that it was her place to obey, without asking questions or troubling herself as to motives.

When the morning for my departure arrived, Lady Lucia Calthorpe inquired if I had seen or retained a medical attendant, as well as a nurse for the expect-

ed infant? I said that I had as yet done neither; for that I was fearful of anticipating any arrangements which she herself might think fit to make. She begged me to take this additional trouble on myself; and I consented.

"But remember," I observed, "if you have a nurse, she will require to be in the room with you——"

"Not with me!" responded Lady Lucia, quickly. "Maria alone shall be my attendant. But if the child leaves—and I hope it will not," she added slowly but emphatically, "the nurse must take care of it in another room. Heaven knows I shall never wish to see its face!"

I was shocked at the manner in which she thus spoke; and my good opinion of her sank considerably.

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Wilton, she cried, with some degree of bitterness, "I dare say you think me very cruel and hard-hearted; but only put yourself in my place——"

"On that subject," I interrupted her, "we will not converse. I am now going to see the medical attendant—and likewise a nurse, whom Mrs. Bunting had recommended. But there is one thing that I ought to ask you, and on which you have no doubt duly reflected. If the child lives, what arrangements do you purpose——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lucia, a dark shade lowering on her beautiful countenance; this is indeed something on which I have scarcely thought—on which I have not dared to think—yet relative to which I have longed to speak to you. What am I to do? You are my guardian genius: and I will follow your advice. My father allows me two hundred guineas a year for my clothes, jewels, and

pocket money. My milliner's and jeweller's bill absorb nearly the whole amount of my income; but I might perhaps manage to spare such a thing as twenty pounds a year. Of course, you know, I hope to marry well some day or another: and then perhaps I shall have more funds at my command."

Lady Lucia spoke in a strain alike so selfish and unfeeling, that my opinion of her was still farther damaged: but yet, considering the cruel circumstances of her position, I did not choose to let her perceive that I was thus shocked and wounded by all she said.

"Twenty pounds a-year," I observed, "would no doubt be sufficient, during the child's infancy to induce some poor person to take care of it."

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Wilton," exclaimed Lucia, "you have now comforted and consoled me by this assurance. You are going to leave me to-day: but you have promised me to return at the time when the crisis arrives—and then, if the babe should live, you will be good enough to carry out the arrangements which you have suggested."

Having promised to do so, I hastened forth to see the medical man and the nurse, both of whom were recommended by Mrs. Bunting. I gave them each retaining fees—hinted that my friend Mrs. Richards was a lady of peculiar habits—and begged that they would not attempt to call upon her until the moment came at which their services were required, when they would be duly summoned. A medical man is always discreet in such cases; and the old nurse was rendered so by the liberality of the amount I placed in her hand. They of course both suspected that it was a case of a young lady retiring temporarily

from the world to conceal her frailty ; but they offered no comment on the matter.

The time occupied in these visits, and the delay which occurred ere I succeeded in finding Mr. Hindley, the surgeon, at home, absorbed the entire morning and a considerable portion of the afternoon. Lady Lucia dined at five o'clock and besought me to remain to partake of this repast with her—a request which I could not find it in my heart to refuse. But still I was resolved to reach home that evening : and therefore ordered the post-chaise to be in readiness at seven o'clock. As the hour for departure drew near, I said to Lucia, "You are in my house, you know, and must accept my hospitalities just as if I remained here to dispense them. Pardon me therefore, if I give you the trouble of making the requisite outlays for the household:"—and I placed a considerable sum of money upon the table."

"You are determined to have your own way, my dear Mrs. Wilton," said Lucia, with a smile. "I never shall be able to express my gratitude sufficiently—"

"Not another word upon this subject," I rejoined, "When the crisis is approaching, you will write me a note, directed to the post-office in Cavendish Street, as before—and in a few hours I will be with you."

The post-chaise was waiting—Lucia embraced me with every appearance of true sisterly affection—and I took my departure. During the drive back to the metropolis I could scarcely think of anything else than of those little incidents which had so much depreciated Lady Lucia Calthorpe in my opinion. I felt that, no matter how grievous the wrong she had suffered at the hands of

Horace Rockingham—no matter how tremendous was the outrage which in its consequences had reduced her to her present painful, embarrassing, and even perilous position—there was something shocking in the thought that she was prepared to visit her bitter rancour upon the innocent babe that in a short time would see the light. It was no longer possible to conceal from myself that there was a large amount of cool-blooded callousness and selfish heartlessness in the composition of Lady Lucia's character ; so that I began to suspect the sincerity of those vows of eternal gratitude, sisterly love, and imperishable affection which she had so profusely lavished upon me. However, I had embarked in the enterprise—heaven knows with what true sympathy, and with what compassionating motives !—and I was determined to pursue the same generosity unto the end.

I have already said that the town of Sittingbourne is exactly forty miles from London ; and as the post-chaise travelled only at the rate of ten miles an hour, there being many steep hills to ascend—it was eleven o'clock before the vehicle entered the southern part of the metropolis. Either in ignorance of the nearest cut, or else conceiving it to be a better route, the postillion took the Waterloo Road instead of the Westminster ; and we thus had to pass Waterloo Bridge. We were at about the middle of the bridge, when the postillion—with a sudden ejaculation of horror, which plainly reached my ears—drew in his horses abruptly, and sprang to the ground. Startled from the deep reverie in which I was plunged, and galvanised with the sudden apprehension that some accident had occurred, I looked

forth from the window. Never shall I forget the scene which at that instant met my view! A female was standing on the parapet of the bridge: the light of the nearest lamp streamed full upon her countenance—it was of a deadly whiteness—the features naturally of exquisite beauty, wore the imprint of utter despair: the raven darkness of her tresses threw out the ghastliness of that countenance into a relief perfectly hideous and appalling. It was but for a single instant that I thus caught a glimpse of her: but the recognition was immediate. It flashed to me like an inspiration; and as the name of Caroline Seymour was about to thrill forth from my lips, she gave one wild cry and disappeared from my view. Oh, that cry!—it was so rending—so piercing, so penetrating in its ineffable anguish and utter despair, that it swept through my brain with all the excruciating poignancy of a barbed arrow. The wretched being had plunged into the dark waters of the Thames which flowed beneath the arches of the Waterloo Bridge.

The postillion made a bound towards the parapet, to clutch at the garments of the unfortunate girl: but he was too late—his humane intention was frustrated. Opening the door of the carriage I sprang forth in all the wild bewilderment and horrified alarm which such a terrific scene was but too well calculated to inspire. Three or four foot-passengers were quickly on the same spot: they, as well as the postillion, sprang upon the parapet; but from their ejaculations I learnt that nothing was to be seen.

"The tide is running out!" cried one: and we all rushed across to the opposite side of the bridge.

We beheld—through the glimmering light which, when it is not the dark wintry season, rests upon the bosom of the water—a dark object moving rapidly: it was a boat shooting over the surface. It stopped:—the voices of two men who were in it now reached our ears: they were speaking quickly and with evident excitement—but we could not hear what they said.

"There!" cried one of the spectators, "they have got her! they are dragging her into the boat!"

"Heaven be thanked!" I murmured audibly.

"Ah! ma'am," said another of the bystanders, "it will be a miracle, though, if the poor creature comes out alive. She most likely dashed against the side of the bridge, or one of the abutments, in her fall. But the boat is pulling rapidly towards the bank! Let's go and see."

I bade the postillion follow with the chaise—while I sped onward in company with those who, together with myself, had been spectators of the scene. We reached the extremity of the bridge nearest the Strand; and in a few moments the two boatmen were bearing their inanimate burthen up the steps. The answers they gave to our hasty and excited question were more cheering than I had anticipated: the unfortunate young woman lived, though she was still in a state of unconsciousness; and so far as they could judge, she had received no injury from concussion with the masonry.

"What is to be done with her?" asked some one.

"Take her to the workhouse," suggested another.

"No—the hospital," cried a third.

"No—the station-house," ejaculated a forth.

"Nothing of the sort!" said I, interposing amongst these hurriedly offered suggestions. "Let her be borne to the nearest tavern or coffee-house; and I will pay all expenses. I will likewise reward you," I continued, specially addressing these words to the boatmen, "for your humane behaviour."

Those who had previously given such heartless recommendations now expressed their admiration of my conduct: and I followed the boatmen, who bore their inanimate burthen to a coffee-house at no great distance. I accompanied them up to a chamber, to which the land-lady, on hearing that she was to be well paid, led the way. In a few minutes a medical man—whom one of the spectators had run to fetch made his appearance: restoratives were administered—all proper attentions were shown—and the unfortunate girl began to recover slowly. I dismissed the boatmen with a liberal reward, and sat down by the side of the bed, in which, with the landlady's help, I had placed Caroline Seymour,—her saturated apparel being taken off, and warm night-garments being readily forthcoming from the mistress of the coffee-house. The surgeon likewise remained; and when Caroline at length opened her large dark eyes, she gazed with a dim and dreamy vacancy around, evidently wondering where she was.

"She is now out of all danger," whispered the surgeon to me; and as I saw that he was in a hurry to take his departure (for he was in full dress), as if summoned from the midst of some friends whom he was entertaining, I placed a fee in his hands. He gave certain

instructions, and retired,—promising to call in the morning.

It was while the landlady had gone down-stairs to procure something which the medical man had ordered, that Caroline Seymour, now sufficiently recovered to be enabled to commence the collection of her ideas, turned her eyes towards me. My presence appeared to give a vivid impulse to the recollections which for the few minutes previously had only been sluggishly reviving: a light sprang up into her eyes—she gazed upon me with increasing meaning in her looks; and when recognition was complete, she murmured with a sort of convulsive movement which shook the very bed under her, "Good heavens, Miss Lambert!"

Her eyes closed suddenly, and she fainted. I could not understand the meaning of this excitement on her part—nor wherefore it should be abruptly followed by a relapse into unconsciousness. I was not even previously aware she knew me by sight. But I did not pause to ponder on these things: I hastened to administer restoratives; and the landlady soon came back to the chamber. Fearing my presence would again be calculated to produce that incomprehensible excitement on the part of the poor girl, I resolved to take my departure.

"I leave her in your charge," said I, placing ample funds in the landlady's hand. "When she recovers she will doubtless ask whether she saw Miss Lambert by the side of the bed. You can tell her that it was so: but if she displays any terror, excitement, or suspense, give her to understand that I entertain nothing but friendly and sympathizing feelings towards her. Let her want

for nothing; and I will see her again to-morrow."

As Catherine was now recovering, I hastened my departure—entered the post-chaise, which was waiting at the door—and was driven to my residence in Sloane Street, wondering the whole time what could have driven Caroline Seymour to that desperate attempt at suicide, and sincerely hoping that no ill conduct on my brother's part could have led to such a catastrophe. It was with difficulty that I composed my features sufficiently to banish from them the mingled horror and dismay which I felt that the occurrence had left thereon. I did not wish Reginald Fortescue to know what had happened—because he would naturally wonder how it was I came by Waterloo Bridge, which was in quite a different direction from that whence I ought to have travelled, if really returning from Cheshire. The instant the chaise stopped, I called the postillion to the window, desiring him to say nothing in the presence of my domestics of the incident of the bridge nor of the way which we had come; and my injunction had all the more weight in consequence of the golden fee with which it was backed. Reginald speedily hastened forth from the house; and in a few moments I was clasped in his arms.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAROLINE SEYMOUR.

CAPTAIN FORTESCUE was on guard the following day; he was therefore compelled to leave me immediately after a somewhat early breakfast; and I was complete mistress of my time. Bet-

ween eleven and twelve in the forenoon I issued forth by myself, to take a conveyance to the coffee-house where I had left Caroline Seymour. As I was proceeding along the street, I bethought me of stepping into the house-agent's to inquire if he had received the remittance safely from Sittingbourne, as he had not sent the usual acknowledgment in the shape of a receipt. I entered the office; and the moment Mr. Perkins saw me, he exclaimed "I have a thousand apologies to offer, ma'am, for not transmitting a receipt by return of post; but I was called out of town within the very hour that I had the pleasure of seeing you—and I only came back yesterday evening."

While he was speaking, my looks accidentally fell upon a plan of a house and estate which lay spread open upon the desk before him—for it was to his private office that I had been shown by the clerk. It was a very large plan; and the name at the bottom was in bold letters of Indian ink. Let the reader conceive how I started, and what myriads of conflicting emotions were in an instant excited in my mind, when I read these words—"The Hawthorn Estate, Cheshire."

"Perhaps you happen to know the property, ma'am?" said Mr. Perkins, perceiving how I was suddenly agitated.

"Yes—I know something of it—I have been in Cheshire," I stammered out: but speedily recovering my self-possession, I said in a more collected manner, "Is it possible that the estate to be sold?"

"Well, between you and me ma'am," replied the agent, "it is to be disposed of by public or by private contract, no matter which; and it was into Cheshire that I was so suddenly sent on that very

same afternoon that you were here a week back."

At this moment the clerk entered, and said, "If you please, sir, young Mr. Rockingham wishes to speak to you. He is in a very great hurry, and will not detain you above a few minutes."

"I am in no hurry," I said to the agent. "By all means go and attend to your business. I will wait here"—for as the reader may suppose, I had no inclination to encounter the detested Horace Rockingham.

"Well, ma'am," said Mr. Perkins, "if you would have kindness to sit down and wait a few minutes I shall be very much obliged:"—then addressing his clerk, he added, "Tell Mr. Rockingham I will come to him immediately."

The house-agent courteously placed a chair for my accommodation, and followed his clerk into the front office. Between the room in which I remained, and that front office there was door the upper half of which was of ground-glass: so that without being seen, I could overhear all that was said in that office.

"I wish to speak to you alone, Mr. Perkins," observed Horace Rockingham, the moment the house-agent made his appearance.

"I am very sorry, sir," was the response, "that I cannot immediately ask you into my private room: for a lady is there upon business. But my clerk shall step out—and it does happen that I have a little business for him to do in the neighbourhood. 'Take this letter, Robert.' He added, now speaking to his clerk, 'and wait for the reply.'"

There was a brief pause, during which I heard the outer door of the front office open and shut—after which the conversation bet-

ween Horace Rockingham and the house-agent was renewed.

"My father has sent me, Mr. Perkins," said Horace, who spoke in a quick excited manner, "to see you without delay. You are to do nothing about the estate until you hear more—"

"But have you brought a letter Mr. Rockingham, to that effect from Mr. Fleming, the lawyer?"

"No—my father was hurrying off to him," answered Horace, "to tell him that something had transpired—"

"But, my dear sir," interrupted Mr. Perkins, "just look for a moment how the matter stands—and you will see that I am not a free agent. Your father owes Mr. Fleming's clients one hundred and fifty thousand pounds—"

"Oh, those accursed speculations," interjected Horace bitterly, "which created the debt!"

With them, my dear sir, I have nothing to do," resumed Perkins. "What are the facts? Your father gives Mr. Fleming a power of sale over his Cheshire estates: the creditors press for the money—and Mr. Fleming sends me down in a tremendous hurry to look at the property and receive the plans from your father's bailiff. You know how I was hastened off, and how peremptory my instructions were—"

"But you only got back last night," interrupted Horace, in a tone of remonstrance: "and you surely do not mean to take steps at once?"

"Mr. Rockingham," said Perkins, "my orders were that the very instant of my return I was to lose no time in drawing up the requisite advertisements and inserting them in the newspapers. Those advertisements will be drawn up to-day and will be sent this evening to all the papers, so

as to appear to-morrow morning. You have therefore several hours before you. Go and obtain Mr. Fleming's written authority for me to suspend these proceedings; and of course I obey. Otherwise I cannot."

"Very good! I will be off at once," exclaimed Rockingham. "For heaven's sake let nothing ooze out in the meantime: it would be ruinous to my father's hopes!"

"Am I to understand, then," inquired Mr. Perkins, "that there is any chance of an amicable settlement, and that the estates will not be brought to the hammer?"

"Every chance!" rejoined Horace, who, by his voice, was evidently in a state of feverish excitement. "Look you, Mr. Perkins—I don't mind telling you exactly how the affair stands; so that you may perceive the vital importance of keeping the thing strictly secret for the present. My father was introduced yesterday to old Seymour—"

"Ah! the wealthy capitalist?" ejaculated Perkins. "But he is a hard-fisted miser, and by no means likely to apart with his money except on the very best security."

"Well, and that security he will have," continued Horace. "Two friends of my father, to whom he has privately revealed his difficulties, will be his security to old Obadiah Seymour for one hundred thousand pounds; and that sum will of course satisfy the creditors, who will not press for the immediate payment of the remaining fifty thousand."

"Ah! this looks well," remarked Perkins, "if it can be carried out. But I repeat, old Seymour is uncommonly shrewd and cunning; and if he thought your father was

in difficulties, he would never lend the money."

"That is the very reason why the affair about the estates must be kept so quiet," continued Horace. "Old Seymour asked for a mortgage: but he was given to understand that my father could not possibly do such a thing, as it would get abroad and he would consider himself altogether dishonoured. It has been represented to Mr. Seymour that my father, having an excellent speculation in view, wishes for this amount—"

"Well, well—I understand," interrupted Perkins. "Nothing shall transpire from my office. Go you quick and get Mr. Fleming's written authority for me to stop the proceedings—and I of course obey. You say your father has gone to Mr. Fleming's?"

"Yes—to tell him that he has every prospect of obtaining one hundred thousand pounds in the course of a day or two; and it is well known that Mr. Fleming's clients will be satisfied with that amount, giving farther time for the payment of the balance."

"Then of course," observed Perkins, "they will still retain the power of sale over the estate to the extent of that balance?"

"Oh, of course!" answered Horace; "and that is the real reason, you understand, why my father cannot execute another mortgage for the money which Mr. Seymour is to advance. It will give my father time to turn himself round; and some lucky hit will re-establish his fortunes."

"Well, I hope you may succeed" said Mr. Perkins: "for though it will be a good thing out of my pocket, yet I am not a man who wishes to see a family plunged into ruin. I only do my duty, Mr. Rockingham; and if you found

me just now a little peremptory, it is because my instructions are of the most imperious character. But why does not your father explain his affairs candidly to Mr. Seymour and get him to advance the whole hundred and fifty thousand thereby taking the place of those who now hold the power of sale over the estate?"

"Because Obadiah Seymour cannot advance more than the hundred thousand at this present moment," answered Horace; and because, even if he could, he would not—as you are well aware that the depreciation of landed property in Cheshire has reduced the estate below the value of the full amount. "Why, what do you think it would fetch at the hammer?"

"Scarcely a hundred and twenty thousand," responded Perkins.

"Well, then, you see," exclaimed Horace, "that my father is playing the best game that can be played under circumstances. So not a word, my dear Mr. Perkins! And now I am off to Mr. Fleming's at once, I will be with you again in a couple of hours."

I heard the outer door open and shut with considerable rapidity; and almost immediately afterwards Mr. Perkins rejoined me in the inner office. I had taken up the newspaper, which I was affecting to read when he thus reappeared: and my countenance betrayed not that I had been listening to a discourse so closely interesting persons whom I knew so well."

"I am afraid, ma'am," said Mr. Perkins, "that I have kept you waiting longer than I promised."

"Oh, do not mention it," I said. There is a review of a most interesting book in this morning's

paper; and I had quite forgotten how time was passing."

"I will give you the receipt at once," said the house-agent; and sitting down to his desk he drew up the acknowledgment for the money which I had remitted to him. He expressed a hope that I had found the cottage equal to my expectations. I answered in the affirmative, and took my leave.

How singular was the coincidence that I should have thus been accidentally rendered a listener to a conversation revealing all the desperate shifts to which the Rockinghams were put to save their property—all the desperate hopes, too, which they entertained of rebuilding the colossal fortunes which unlucky speculations had almost levelled to the ground! What emotions had been excited in my bosom as I glanced at the plan of that estate which contained the village where I had lived for so many years, and where I had known so much unhappiness. But that name of Seymour!—here again was a singular coincidence. I was contemplating a visit to an unfortunate girl of the name of Seymour; and that same name had been again introduced to my knowledge, but in connexion with a money-lender.

Such were the reflections which passed through my mind as I was borne in a hackney-coach from the neighbourhood of Sloane Street to the coffee-house in the vicinage of Waterloo Bridge. On alighting at the private door of the house, I at once inquired of the female servant who gave me admittance, how the patient was? I learnt that she was out of all danger—that she had enjoyed several hours of uninterrupted repose—that her mind appeared

comparatively tranquil—that the doctor had been, and that his opinion was completely favourable as to her recovery from the effects of her attempted suicide. I ascended towards the chamber which Caroline Seymour occupied, and encountered the landlady on the stairs. From her lips I received a repetition of the particulars just gathered from the domestic,—together with a few additional details.

“The poor creature,” said the landlady, “did put to me the question which you fancied she might ask: and when I told her that it was really a young lady named Miss Lambert whom she had seen, and who had done everything for her, she gave away to the wildest grief,—declaring that she was unworthy of so much goodness at your hands—that she had behaved very wickedly towards you—and that she should never dare look you in the face again. Of course I did not understand what she meant: neither did I ask. I said all I could do to console her—and I succeeded. This morning she awoke comparatively calm: she has slept again a little: and now she is awake, and fully prepared to receive you. Indeed, Miss Lambert, her mind seems to have taken a turn; and she is anxious for your coming.”

“You had better, perhaps, go up and tell her I am here,” I said. “It may save her some little excitement.”

The landlady hastened to execute my orders—while I remained on the stairs; and during the few minutes of her absence I wondered what Caroline Seymour could possibly have done to fill her with so much remorse in respect to me. The only conjecture I could form, was that she had behaved ill towards my brother, and there-

fore considered that I should take her conduct as offensive to myself.

“You can go up now, miss,” said the landlady, as she reappeared. “The poor creature is anxious to see you. You had better go alone.”

I ascended to the chamber, and as I entered I put on a smiling and encouraging look, at the same time giving utterance to some sympathizing words,—so as at once to convince the unfortunate creature that I was by no means incensed against her. I will here pause for a moment to observe that she was eminently beautiful: her countenance was now very pale—but that pallor only rendered her all the more interesting; and she looked as if she were recovering from a long and painful illness. She had hair of raven darkness, and of extraordinary luxuriance; her eyes also dark, were large, and wore now a soft pensive expression. Her features were small and classically chiselled: her teeth were of pearly whiteness. Her figure, though slight, was of symmetrical proportions: it was not tall—but, as I recollected her appearance at the Opera, it was replete with elegance and grace. There was an air of superiority, or at least of gentility about her: and her age might be nineteen or twenty.

I entered, I say, with a reassuring countenance, and with a few kindly appropriate words. Caroline raised herself in the bed—looked at me in a half-timid half-anguished manner for a few moments—and then, as I sat down on a chair by the side of the couch, she seized my hands, pressing them to her lips. She endeavoured to speak: but her heart was evidently too full for the

utterance of what she felt—and the tears gushed forth from her eyes.

"Compose yourself," I said; "give not way thus to your emotions. You need tranquillity. Rest assured that in me you behold a friend!"

"Ah, Miss Lambert!" she exclaimed, with a sudden access of wildness; "if you only knew who I am——"

"I do know," I answered gently: "your name is Caroline Seymour."

"Ah, you know me, then?" she ejaculated, surveying me with astonishment. "But you do not know all I have done—all the wickedness of which I have been guilty!"

"No: I am ignorant of the cause of these self-reproaches. But," I hastened to add, in a compassionate tone, "after the scene of last night, whatever misdeeds you may have previously committed, no one would be cruel enough to reproach you for them."

"Oh, that scene of last night!" murmured Caroline, shivering and shuddering all over. "Good heavens, it was dreadful!"—and then she placed her fair white hands over her eyes, as if to shut out objects of appalling horror.

"Do not distress yourself," I murmured softly in her ear: for inasmuch as you know me, you are probably, alas! too well aware that I am not one who has a right to reproach you. But tell me, Caroline—tell me at once—was it my brother——"

"Who drove me to desperation last night?" she ejaculated quickly, as she withdrew her hands from her eyes and bent those orbs upon me. "No, no—it was not he!" It was a wretch—a villain—the vile fiend that ever wore an angel-shape!"

"Some one, perhaps, whom you loved?" I said, still speaking in a soft soothing voice.

"One whom I did love," rejoined Caroline.—"and one whom you know likewise but too well, Horace Rockingham!"

"Horace Rockingham?" I ejaculated, stricken with amazement. "What! has he wronged you—has he outraged you——"

"Oh! it is such a history," cried the unfortunate creature, "that if I can calm myself sufficiently to tell it—But yes, I must! I have resolved to make you aware of everything. It is the only atonement I can offer for the past. Ah! you look upon me with surprise? You little think, Miss Lambert, how much I have had to do in the detestable machinations of that vile young man!"

"Compose yourself, Caroline," I again said. "Whatever you may have to tell me, I pray you to enter upon the narrative without excitement. You will only do yourself harm; and I can assure you that so far as I may be concerned, you have my free and full forgiveness on account of the past. At the same time, I am totally at a loss to understand how you could ever have had anything to do——"

"Listen, and I will tell you everything!" interrupted Caroline.

Then, lying back upon her pillow, she remained silent for several minutes, during which she was evidently composing her feelings as well as she could, and collecting her ideas for the promised revelations. I should observe that in the paroxysm of her excitement which was now passing away, I had noticed the flashings of wild and unnatural fires in her eyes—flashings which were strangely different from the

pensive look which she had worn when I first entered; and those flashings also bespoke the strong fervid passions of which her nature was susceptible.

"I am the daughter," proceeded Caroline, at length breaking her long pause, "of wealthy parents. I was their only child. My mother doted upon me and spoilt me. My father—a very different being from my mother—was too much engrossed in his money-getting pursuits to pay much attention to me; and he was rather proud than fond as I grew up in beauty. Think me not vain for this allusion to my personal attractions—I ought to curse and abhor that loveliness," she exclaimed with vehement bitterness, "rather than be proud of it! My mother died when I was twelve years old; and in her I lost my good genius. I was then sent to a boarding-school—where I remained, with the exception of the vacations, until I was sixteen. That was three years and a half ago: for twenty summers have not yet passed over my head—although I have seen and gone through so much."

These last words were spoken with a profound mournfulness; and the transitions from impassionate vehemence to an exquisitely pathetic sorrow, which frequently characterized her narrative, gave me a still deeper insight into her impulsive and variable disposition.

"My father," she continued, "though an exceeding rich man—I may say literally rolling in wealth—"

"Pardon me for a moment!" I interrupted her somewhat impetuously and with a look of excitement which I could not possibly control: "but what is your father's Christian name?"

"Obadiah," she answered. "Everybody knows Obadiah Seymour, the great capitalist of Broad Street. But wherefore did you ask? what has arisen in your mind?"

"I will tell you presently," I said, more than ever struck by the strange coincidences which had occurred within the last few hours. "Proceed with your narrative."

"I was saying," resumed Caroline, "that when I was sixteen I was taken away from school; and my father bade me enter on the superintendence of the household establishment. There was not, however, much to need such supervision: for we kept but two servants—saw very little company—and everything was conducted according to the rules of rigid economy. In short, Miss Lambert, my father is a miser. For many years of his life he had been a spendthrift: he married late: my mother brought some little money—he grew suddenly steady—and being resolved to atone for the past, rapidly fell into the opposite extreme. The earlier portion of his existence was marked by lavish profusion—the latter portion by an increasing grinding parsimony. The life I led was gloomy and monotonous enough—with no female relative nor friends to counsel, to guide, or to protect me. I was not seventeen when accident threw Horace Rockingham in my way. He had recently left college, and had come up to London to pass a portion of the vacation. He wanted money—he did not dare apply to his own father—an acquaintance introduced him to mine. He was invited to dinner; for my father now and then entertained a few persons at his table;—and thus did Horace

become known to me: You, who know him likewise do not require to be told that he is almost preternaturally beautiful—and that when he chooses he can render his manners, aided by the soft music of his voice, fascinating to a degree. He did not dare call at the house—for my father would not allow a frequent reception of visitors: but he waylaid me every time I went out. Thus we met clandestinely. I loved him—Oh, how I loved him! He vowed and protested that he loved me as fondly and as well. We never spoke of marriage: we were both so young! but I thought that Horace was only waiting until we were older, in order to place himself in the position of an honourable suitor, I could not conceive that all this while my father was entertaining different views with regard to me. It was, however, so; and one day, about six months after my acquaintance with Horace had commenced, my father addressed me in the following terms:—Caroline, Alderman Shaw's son has been paying you some attentions; and you do not appear to have received them properly. This must not be: you are both to receive and reciprocate them. I mean him to lead you to the altar. He is a thriving man—knows the value of money—is already rich by his own industry—and will be richer still at the Alderman's death. So you will receive Mr. Shaw's attentions with a smile. He has already spoken to me: I have accepted him as a son-in-law—and in a month we will have a wedding.—Having thus spoken, my father quitted with his wonted abruptness.

Here Caroline paused: but after a few minutes she pursued her

narrative in the following manner:—

“Even if I had not been devoted to Horace Rockingham, the idea of espousing Mr. Shaw would have been revolting—almost loathsome: for he was a coarse-mannered person, double my age, and of very unprepossessing appearance. I flew in despair to the appointment which I had with Horace. Alas, that I should have listened to the insidious language he breathed in my ear! He besought me to fly with him; his words were full of guileful tenderness—his looks sank down into my very soul; it was impossible to resist, loving him as I did the soft persuasiveness of his tone. That same day I quitted my father's house, and accompanied Horace to a lodging which he had in the meantime taken for our reception. I was infatuated—I believed him true—and, without the marriage ceremonies being performed, I surrendered myself up to him.

Here the unfortunate young woman again stopped short: and covering her face with her hands, sobbed bitterly for some moments. Growing comparatively tranquil again, she resumed her history as follows:—

“So intense was the passion which I experienced for Horace Rockingham—so deep, fond, and enthusiastic was my love—that for the first few weeks we were together I rejoiced in the step I had taken. I thought not of my father—or if I did, only to dread that he would discover my retreat and bear me home; but I am bound to confess that it was with no compunctious emotion that I thus thought of him. The first shock which I received in the midst of bliss was the announcement one morning from Horace that he

dared not remain in London any longer for the present—but that he must return into Cheshire, to Hawthorn Hall. Then I found that even in the paradise offlowers which my imagination had created there was a withered plant—and that over the heaven of my felicity, it was possible for a cloud to steal. I implored Horace to take me with him and suffer me to remain in the neighbourhood of his home—declaring that the humblest cottage would suffice as a dwelling for me. But he had a thousand objections wherewith to over-rule my wishes and prayers; and all his arguments were conveyed with so much seeming tenderness on his part that it actually became a proof of love on my side to submit to his will. He left me ample funds and departed. Months passed away, during which he returned not: but he frequently wrote to cheer and console me. I was miserable in one sense, yet happy in another—miserable to be separated from him, yet, happy to think that the sacrifices I made were regarded by him as proofs of my love. He returned after a while: again he stayed a few weeks with me—again was an earthly paradise opened to my knowledge; but again did the weeds spring up in the midst of the flowers—again did the cloud come over the heaven of my fancy. He left me a second time—and once more was I alone. Months now again passed away, during which his letters became fewer in number, shorter in their contents, and less endearing in their strain: but still I endeavoured to blind myself to the evidences of my own senses. I strove and strained—aye, excruciatingly—to close my inward faculty of hearing to the still small

voice that whispered up from the depths of my soul, telling me I was betrayed. At length I wrote to him at the post-office at Riverdale, beseeching him that he would come back or that he would suffer me to hasten down into his neighbourhood. A few days afterwards he made his appearance in London. His demeanour towards me was such as to relieve me of all anxieties in respect to the constancy of his love: but this renewal of my wild, fantastic, foolish vision of bliss was of brief duration; for at the end of a week he told me somewhat abruptly that he must take his departure again. When I remonstrated, entreated, wept and prayed, he gave me to understand that he was making a thousand sacrifices on my behalf, and that I must nerve myself to make commensurate ones for him; so that by insidious argument and guileful language, all conveyed in the melting accents of his melodious voice, he made my obedience to his will assume the semblance of the only proof of love which it was in my power to give him. I yielded—I promised to do all he desired, and to keep our amour profoundly secret. He departed. When he was gone, I flew to my desk to console myself by devouring the letters he had written me from Hawthorn Hall during the several periods of our separation; but they were not there! I felt as if smitten by a sudden blow: my eyes were opened all in a moment to the perfidy of Rockingham: I saw that I was betrayed!"

Again Caroline Seymour paused: the tears trickled down her cheeks, and she sobbed convulsively. But with one of those rapid transitions from one state of feeling to another, which so peculiarly characterized her, she

wiped away her tears—her sobs ceased abruptly—and as her eyes flashed fire, while her naturally beautiful countenance became distorted with an almost fiendish expression of dark, deep, concentrated rage, she went on as follows:—

“Yes—I was betrayed—cruelly betrayed! he had come to London merely for the purpose of obtaining—nay, more, plundering from me the only evidence which existed of the marriage promises which he had made. My love did not turn to hate: no—it was *then* too strong, too deep, too closely intertwined with all the chords of my heart to experience such a change. But still I had my pride; and I could not bring myself to write at once in a spirit of either remonstrance or entreaty. Judging by my own love, I still buoyed myself up with the hope that his affection would revive—that remorse would touch him—and that he would return or write; but he did not. Then I wrote. The only answer I received was an envelope containing a sum of money. I flung the bank-notes into the fire; and saying to myself, “Everything is, indeed, now at an end between us!” I proceeded to my father’s house. I cannot describe the state of my feelings; it was a sort of numbness of all the senses, as if a fearful consternation were upon me. What I was doing appeared to be done mechanically: no tears trickled down my cheek—but I felt that my breath was half-hushed, as if I were walking along stealthily in the dead of night to do some deed of guilt or mystery. I knocked at the door of the house in Broad Street—that house which I had abandoned a year before! My father himself opened the door; he had doubtless seen me from

a window. I was about to throw myself at his feet in a paroxysm of all the acutest feelings of anguish, remorse, and despair, when he sternly bade me depart, flinging me off for ever! The next instant the door was closed in my face! and I dragged myself away a homeless outcast, in a state of mind which I shall not attempt to describe.”

“Alas, alas, poor girl!” said I, almost suffocated by my own painful emotions; for I remembered with what bitter feelings, I had left my own home on that memorable night when I wandered forth a voluntary exile, and when accident threw me in the way of Mr. Alvanly.

“Oh, my dear Miss Lambert!” exclaimed Caroline Seymour, in one of those sudden and wild gushes of feeling to which it was her impulsive nature to give way; “had my father received me—had the door of my paternal home been opened to me—I should not have become the lost creature I since have been. God knows that though I had fallen, I was not deprived! Love alone had made me weak. No—it was not even love alone; it was the terror of being forced into marriage with one whom I detested and abhorred. This was it, together with my young heart’s idolizing worship, that had led my steps astray from the path of virtue. Oh, I was to be pitied—not blamed! Heavens, that my own father should have driven me away from his door! Had he received me in his arms—had he welcomed the penitent home—had he given me the chance of returning into virtue’s face I should have been saved. I had erred through love and under the influence of terror: I subsequently erred in the desperation of my feelings and to procure myself

bread. I will not—I cannot dwell at length upon that portion of my narrative. Suffice it to say that it was not merely despair which took possession of me when I thus became an outcast: it was likewise a reckless indifference for whatsoever might be my fate, together with a haughty disregard of the world:—in short, it was an unnatural state of feeling, terrible for any human being to experience but doubly horrible when it became the lot of a young creature of but a few months past eighteen. I fell under the protection of a young nobleman, with whom I lived but a few weeks; for he was suddenly ordered abroad on some diplomatic mission—and he left me with an abruptness which only tended to sour my temper all the more bitterly against the world. For several months following I led a wayward, dissipated life, on which I shuddered to look back. It must have been very nearly four months ago, when one day, as I was walking through some street at the West End, I suddenly encountered Horace Rockingham. He accosted me with as much effrontery as if his conduct had never been tainted with perfidiousness. All in a moment did he regain his empire over me. He accompanied me to my lodgings: I was almost penniless at the time—he sent out to order a luxurious repast—champagne and all delicacies; we spent the remainder of the day together. When excited with wine, I found myself listening to some tale of contemplated vengeance which he was breathing in my ears. At first I scarcely understood him: but by degrees I grew interested. For, with an unblushing indelicacy, he told me how—since he had last seen me—he had loved another, and how

this other had, a few months back, prevented him from forming a brilliant alliance. That other, Miss Lambert, was yourself.”

“And did he tell you,” I asked, in a deep, hollow tone, how he compelled me to surrender up my virtue—and that it was through revenge I prevented him from marrying Lord Eveleigh’s daughter?”

“I scarcely remember now all that he told me,” replied Caroline: “for my brain was in a whirl. Suffice it to say, he told me enough to make me hate you. I regarded you as the rival who had supplanted me in his affections; and when he spoke of vengeance, I entered with fiendish delight into his views. He fanned the flame which he had thus excited, with all that consummate artifice of language in which he is so proficient; he made me believe that if he had not seen you in Cheshire he should never have abandoned me. All the worst passions of human nature were terribly aroused and accumulated within me. Such passions and such feelings render their victim an easy instrument in the hands of a designing person. Such I became in the hands of Horace Rockingham;—and now commences that portion of my narrative which regards yourself and your brother.”

Caroline Seymour paused, and fixed upon me a look which eloquently asked me whether she should proceed—or whether I had heard enough.

“Continue,” I said. “I have promised to forgive all the past so far as you are concerned; and I will keep my word.” But you must suffer me,” exclaimed Caroline Seymour, “to travel rapidly over the remainder of my history. I could not possibly linger upon the details!”

"Tell it in your own way," I answered: "so that you make me acquainted with everything."

"Nothing shall be concealed," rejoined Caroline. "You understand, from what I have said, that I regarded you as a rival. I hated you: I readily and greedily entered into Horace Rockingham's scheme of vengeance. Your brother Cyril had just arrived from the Continent. One of his acquaintances happened to be known to Rockingham; and thus the latter acquired an insight into your brother's pursuits. Through *him* was Horace resolved to wreak at least a portion of his vengeance upon *you*. He set a watch upon Cyril, and found that he had taken a lodging in Bond Street. Then that fiend-like youth instructed me in the part which I was to enact. I went the very next day and hired lodgings in the same house. I threw myself in Cyril's way: everything progressed as was both desired and anticipated—I became your brother's mistress. Do you ask whether I loved him? No—I hated him, for the simple reason that he was your brother! My heart was unnaturally warped—my feelings were fiendishly perverted, by the inculcations of Horace Rockingham's insidious eloquence. It was supposed that your brother Cyril, was connected with forgers—"

"Forgers!" I ejaculated, staring with affright.

"Oh! listen—and do not interrupt me," said Caroline; "or I shall take your words as reproaches—I shall be unable to proceed."

"Go on, go on," I said. Not another word will I speak until you have finished."

"Yes," continued Caroline, "Horace Rockingham had learnt that Cyril had been upon the Continent with some of his evil

companions, for the purpose of passing off forged Bank of England notes amongst the money-changers there; and that he intended to pursue a similar course in London. I was to watch him—to worm myself into his confidence—to discover his secrets—so that information might be given to the authorities, and a fearful blow might be struck at your feelings by the plunging of your brother into a felon's gaol. It did not however appear that Cyril was really engaged in such dangerous pursuits in the metropolis at the time. He had frequented gambling-tables, and by a run of good luck obtained sufficient to keep up appearances without having recourse to more perilous ventures, Horace Rockingham was disappointed: but his restless disposition, panting for bitter vengeance against you, would not permit him to give up his designs. How could you be humiliated? This was now the question. One evening Horace was at the Opera. I and your brother were likewise there: you and Mr. Alvanly were also there. Horace, from a distance perceived how you shrank back in your box when you caught sight of your brother; and he said to himself, "Ah! she recoils from the idea, lost and degraded as she is, to encounter her brother's looks!" He came round to you, and breathed his vindictive threats in your ears. As you issued forth from the Opera, you were insulted by some low woman: *she* had been paid by Rockingham thus to crown you with humiliation before your protector and the assembled lacqueys. On the following morning he sent me, in an envelope, a note which I was to lay upon the breakfast-table, and represent to Cyril that it had

been left by some slatternly woman-servant. The note was a scrawl, the better to disguise Horace Rockingham's hand, in case you or Cyril might happen to be acquainted with it: and it was simply to inform your brother where you were living. He called upon you——"

"Oh, the wickedness—the fiend-like malignity of Horace Rockingham!" I exclaimed, unable for the moment to control my feelings, and forgetful of my promise not to interrupt Miss Seymour again.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "I see I must bring my narrative to a speedy conclusion. Horace Rockingham remained implacable towards you; and I continued in the same spirit, Cyril never suspected what was going on: he had not the slightest idea that I was acquainted with Horace, or that I frequently met him to receive his satanic inspirations. Satanic indeed! He made me write anonymous letters to Mr. Alvanly in the hope of causing that gentleman to abandon you abruptly. Just at the time, after a very brief connexion, your brother Cyril one day abandoned me. I believe that he attributed to jealousy the almost incessant watch I kept over his actions: it grew irksome and intolerable—he fled, leaving me penniless. I again became the mistress of Horace; but the means he allowed me were scanty—and he hinted that his father had grown parsimonious and niggard in providing him with funds. While affecting love he only kept me in the hope of making me the instrument of his vengeance. Ah, Miss Lambert! never shall I forget the day I first saw you. I was walking in the Park—it was not long after your connexion with Captain Fortescue commenced——"

"You did not, then, see me that night at the Opera?" I interjectingly observed.

"No—it was not till afterwards that I knew you had been there, and that Horace had spoken to you, I did not know you *then* by sight—only by name; it was in the Park, as I was about to explain, that I first beheld you. I was roaming there by myself, gazing with envious and jealous eyes upon the brilliant company which swept past in splendid equipages or mounted on beautiful steeds; and I was thinking to myself that my charms ought to have placed me in a position to occupy one of those vehicles, or to ride upon one of those steeds. But there was one young lady there, whose appearance struck me more than all the rest. Eminently beautiful did she seem,—the graces of her figure set off by the tightly fitting riding-habit—the plumes waving from her hat—her countenance all radiant with smiles. She was mounted on a dark steed: her companion best rode a splendid gray horse—and he was one of the handsomest of men. The cavalcade swept past: that lady and that gentleman, followed by a groom in a handsome livery, were soon lost in the distance; and as I stood looking after them, I was startled from my reverie by a light touch on the shoulder, and a well-known voice whispering in my ear, "She whom you admire is Rosa Lambert!"—Yes: it was you and your companion was Captain Fortescue."

"And he who whispered my name," I said, was doubtless Horace Rockingham?"

"Yes—it was he," answered Caroline; and as I abruptly turned round, I caught the vanishing expression of a sinister dazzling

glare, which in moments of strong feeling often lights up his eyes—”

“Ah! and I have seen that ominous light also flaming there,” I said with a shudder. “It is like a beacon placed upon a quicksand, which lures to its ruin the vessel that hails it as the Pharos of a friendly port, while it is in reality gleaming over the very destruction that is in imminent!”

“Alas, yes!” observed Caroline, with a profound sigh. “But as I was about to narrate, I turned and beheld Horace Rockingham. ‘Do you not think,’ he asked, ‘that she is very beautiful?’—‘Very,’ was my curt response,—‘So beautiful,’ he added, with another flashing up of the fearful light in his eyes, ‘that she eclipsed you in my estimation.’—‘Yes,’ I ejaculated ‘I hate her! Show me how I can be avenged!’—‘We will see in a short time,’ rejoined Horace. ‘Think not for a moment that my vengeance sleeps. No, no: it merely watches its opportunity!’”

“The malignant fiend!” I murmured to myself.

“Some little time after I had thus seen you in the Park,” continued Caroline, “and as near as I can calculate about a month ago, Horace Rockingham instructed me to write anonymous letters to Sir Reginald, who was known to be very particular in respect to his son’s conduct. A few days afterwards—and this was but three weeks ago—Horace dictated to me that letter which you received, which was signed *Your Unknown Friend*, and which was full of the vilest misrepresentations with regard to your protector. That very same evening Horace Rockingham told me, with unfeeling abruptness, that he required me no more—that he had enough to do with vengeance, for

that you were more than a match for him.”

“But he did not tell you,” I observed “how that note which he prompted you to write, had an intent far beyond the mere laceration of my feeling through the medium of my love and jealousy? He did not tell you, perhaps, how I was beguiled to a den of infamy, where the fiend-like young man, with weapons in his hands, endeavoured to coerce me to his purpose? nor how I overwhelmed him in a moment by the revelation of a secret which he little thought had come to my knowledge?”

“No—he told me nothing of all this,” answered Caroline, in amazement. “And that secret—”

“You shall learn it presently,” I said, “Conclude your narrative first.”

“Horace Rockingham abandoned me abruptly, leaving me absolutely penniless. The rent was unpaid at the lodgings: the landlady seized my wardrobe, and thrust me forth into the street. As I have now said, three weeks have elapsed since that day. I was reduced to despair. I had no one to whom I could apply for a shilling. Once more I thought of making an endeavour to re-enter the paternal home. From a miserable lodging in which I found refuge, I addressed a penitent letter to my father: I told him how I had been beguiled and who was the beguiler. I sent this letter by the woman of the house in which I had taken a humble apartment: she came back with the intelligence that my father had refused to open the letter. Oh! Miss Lambert, what was I to do? To sink down into the very dregs of society—to go forth into the public streets and add another to the ranks of misfortune and crime which ply

their hideous traffic there—no, no, I could not! How these last three weeks have passed away, I can scarcely tell. Turned out of that humble lodging at the expiration of the first week, because I could not pay the rent and had no effects to offer as a guarantee, — I managed to obtain an attic in another house; and there I sought needlework. But all in vain. Who would give work to a friendless, characterless being who had no security to offer—no proofs of respectability to advance? Again turned out of even that wretched attic, I have for the last few days known the most terrible privations. At length my miseries, my anguish and my despair—yes, and my remorse, reached that point at which they became intolerable: I resolved to hasten to Broad Street—knock at my father's door—and if refused admittance, lay myself down there to die! It was between nine and ten o'clock last night that I determined upon this course: but as I entered the street, I was seized with so overwhelming a sense of shame, that I could not proceed, thousand terrible ideas swept like vultures through my mind. What if I were spurned by the very domestics who had once obeyed me? what if the police were to bear me away as a vagrant and a beggar, from the steps of the very house which was once my home? A voice whispered in my soul that at my father's hands no mercy was to be expected; he had closed the door against me a year back—and but a few days had elapsed since he had returned my letter unopened. No: I could not encounter those tremendous humiliations which awaited me if I persevered in my intent! I turned and wandered slowly away from the neighbourhood of my father's

house. Oh, the anguish of my thoughts! Good heavens! if those who hover upon the brink of frailty could only for a single moment have a foretaste of the bitter, bitter consequence that must ensue—"

"Go on with your narrative, Caroline—go on with it quick!" I interrupted her, in a hoarse voice: for the words to which she was giving such pathetic utterance, smote me as being prophetic of the doom which must inevitably await all those of my sex who fell from the path of virtue.

"Yes, yes—I will not digress again," she said, in a moment comprehending what was passing in my mind. "I was wandering onward, listless and indifferent as to whither my vagrant footsteps bore me,—when all of a sudden, by the light of a street-lamp, I found myself face to face with Horace Rockingham. I caught him by the arm—I told him that I reduced to the very lowest degree of destitution and misery—that I had thought of going to my father and imploring his mercy—but that I dared not! 'No,' replied Horace, in a most unfeeling manner; 'I should think that you would do well not to incur the risk of being spurned from his door. He is even capable of having you sent to the House of Correction by way of punishing and reforming you.'"

"Ah!" I exclaimed, "the fiend spoke to you thus?—and it was last night?"

"Yes," rejoined Caroline, the dark shade coming over her countenance at the recollection thus vividly conjured up.

"And it was yesterday," I thought to myself "that Mr. Rockingham senior was introduced to this poor girl's father for the purpose of obtaining a loan. Oh!" I

exclaimed aloud, "I can but too well understand wherefore Horace should have been filled with dismay at the idea of your throwing yourself at your father's feet last night! Your father is doubtless in complete ignorance of who the author of your ruin was?"

"He could not possibly know it," answered Caroline. "But wherefore say you that you can full well understand the motives of Horace Rockingham—"

"I will explain presently, Finish your narrative."

"It needs but a few more words to complete it," said Caroline. "I besought Horace Rockingham last night to save me from distress: and when he smiled, methought superciliously, I upbraided him bitterly as my betrayer—my deceiver—the worker of my ruin! A fiendish expression appeared upon his countenance: my upbraidings grew more violent—I was reduced to despair—I even vowed vengeance against him. He flung insulting taunts at me—declared that he had never loved me—that I had served as a toy and a plaything—and that if ever I dared cross his path again—But I waited to hear no more. Mad-dened—frantic—wild with frenzy, I rushed away, not knowing nor caring which direction I pursued. My rapid erratic footsteps led me towards Waterloo Bridge; and as I beheld the double line of lights marking the span of the river, and the gates at the entrance of the bridge. I stopped suddenly short. A frightful idea had flashed to my brain. Oh! beneath the arches of the bridge rolled the water in whose dark depths lay the one pearl that was priceless for me now—oblivion! to escape from the hideous miseries which had enmeshed me—to fly

from a world in which, though so young, I had experienced so much bitter sorrow—the opportunity was at hand! The idea, at the first instant so frightful, became the next moment one to be clutched at greedily. Yes—I was bent on suicide. My brain was in wild confusion; and yet it had a horrible clearness. I said to myself, "I must pass tranquilly and quietly through the gates at the entrance, or else my design will be penetrated. I shall be stopped and sent to prison." But, ah! a thought struck me. The toll! With as much desperate suspense as if it were in search for the means to purchase a penny roll to save myself from starving, I plunged my hand into the pocket of my dress. There was just one penny there—One single penny! I had not known that I was even so rich. A moment before I had trembled lest poverty would even prevent me from committing suicide—at least at that particular bridge. Oh, it was Satan himself who had hidden that one coin in the depth of my pocket, so that it should escape my search when I wanted to buy bread, but should come ready to my hand when I purposed to pay the toll which led to the path of contemplated self-destruction!"

"Unhappy girl!" I could not help exclaiming. "But, oh! that miscreant Rockingham! A few pounds—nay, even a few shillings might have turned all your thoughts into another direction. But go on—go on."

"Assuming as collected an air as possible, I paid the toll—passed through the gate—and felt that there now remained but one barrier to be crossed—the parapet of the bridge—ere I should obtain relief from all my earthly cares. There was a wild and fearful exultation

in the thought: I quickened my pace—in a few moments I ran—I was now afraid lest some sudden scruple should arise and with the strength of an outstretched invisible hand hold me back. I heard the sounds of some equipage approaching: I felt that if I suffered the moments to glide by, I should repent—I should recoil from the meditated deed. To leap upon the parapet was the work of an instant: the equipage came up—some one rushed forward to hold me back—there was frenzy in my brain—desperate was the bound I took—and then—O horror!

Quivering and shuddering so that the bed again shook beneath the unhappy girl, she pressed her hands to her temples, covering her eyes with the palms as if to shut out a terrific object from her view.

"Say no more, Caroline!" I exclaimed: "think no more of what is passed! That chaise which came up, was the one that bore me: the man whose hand was stretched out to draw you back, was the postillion."

"And heaven has sent me a friend in you!" murmured the poor creature,—"you whom I hated, and against whom I cherished an implacable vengeance! May God forgive me. If I hated you deeply, I now love you ten thousand fold: if I longed to work an injury, I would now lay down my life to prevent a single hair of your head from being harmed!"

"I know it—I know it, Caroline," I said, taking her hands and pressing them in my own. "I understand full well your strange impulsive nature: all your feelings are in extremes—"

"Miss Lambert," she answered, fixing her eyes upon me with a deep earnest gaze, "I now love you as if you were my sister: but

I hate Horace Rockingham with an intensity as strong as my worship for him was once potent. Oh! to be revenged on that devil in an angel shape!"

"And you shall be revenged, Caroline!" I rejoined impressively.

"Revenged! What mean you?" she ejaculated, her looks suddenly brightening up, so that her eyes flamed and a hectic colour glowed upon her sunken cheeks.

"Just now," I said, "you were struck by a question which I put as to your father's Christian name and but a few minutes have elapsed since you were again surprised that I should have expressed myself as able to comprehend wherefore Horace Rockingham was so terrified—for it was indeed terror that he experienced last night—lest you should throw yourself at your father's feet and tell the name of the villain and all his villainy. Now, Caroline, the means of vengeance are in our hands. I say *our* hands, because I also, after everything you have told me—but more on my brother's account than on my own—have a terrible reckoning to take with that being whom you so well describe as a devil in angel shape. Were I other than I am, and did such lips as mine dare speak of holy things, I would even say that there is the finger of heaven in all this—and that by preterhuman intervention it is given to me to bring about the hour of retribution for Horace Rockingham."

"Oh, explain yourself—explain yourself, my dearest friend!" cried Miss Seymour, almost wild with the excitement of vindictive hope.

"A few words will suffice," I answered. "Yesterday—and only yesterday—was Mr. Rockingham,

senior, introduced to your father to obtain the loan of a sum of money to save him from ruin!"

"Heavens, if this were possible!" cried the old usurer's daughter.

It is possible. It is more than possible—it is true," I responded. All this has been brought to my knowledge by the strangest of coincidences: I will not pause to tell you how—because there is work to be done, I go straight hence to your father."

"Oh, Miss Lambert!" exclaimed Caroline joining her hands in impassioned entreaty—"if you would but avail yourself of this opportunity to breathe in my father's ear that a penitent and a wretched daughter—a daughter who has been deeply, far too deeply punished—implores permission to cast herself at his feet—"

"Rest assured, Caroline," I interrupted her, "that I shall not forget to plead your cause: but I shall do in a way that, if from all you have told me I rightly understand your father's character, will I think be almost certain of success. Do not however buoy yourself up with hopes that may be disappointed: prepare yourself for the worst—so that if the best should come, the joy thereof will be all the greater.

"Go, my best and dearest friend" murmured the unfortunate girl, trembling with suspense: "and for heaven's sake, be not long ere you return!"

I promised to lose no time; and having embraced her, took my departure.

CHAPTER XV.

THE USURER.

I had ordered the hackney-coach to wait for me; and now I

directed the driver to take me to Broad Street, City. While proceeding hither, I reviewed all I had learnt from the lips of Caroline Seymour—not so much for the purpose of keeping alive the flame of vindictive cravings, that burnt in my bosom, as for that of assuring myself that I had formed an exact appreciation of her father's character. According to the standard of that disposition, and the way that I understood its selfishness, its artlessness, its weak and its strong points, did I propose to adopt my own plan of proceeding. All the details of this plan were duly settled in my brain by the time that the Hackney-coach stopped in front of one of the dingy, dismal-looking houses in Broad Street.

On alighting, I knocked at the door. An elderly female-servant, with a sour aspect and half-starved appearance, answered the summons at the end of an interval so long that I was just on the point of knocking again.

"Is Mr. Seymour at home?" I inquired.

"Yes—he is, ma'am," responded the domestic: and she looked very hard at me, as if wondering what a person of my sex, apparel, and appearance could possibly want with her master.

"I wish to see him on particular business," I at once said with an air of decision.

The servant conducted me into a parlour on the ground-floor; and inquired what name she should take to her master. I replied that it was no use to give any name, as he was unacquainted with mine: but I added that my business was of the most serious importance. The woman retired; and during the few minutes which elapsed ere Mr. Seymour made his appearance, I cast my

eyes around the room. The furniture was old-fashioned and had never been very costly : the window-curtains, once red, were all faded and covered with dust : the carpet was threadbare ; the walls had not been repaired for years, nor the ceiling white-washed. It must have been his own house—or else the terms of his lease would have decidedly compelled him to paint the wood-work more frequently than it could possibly have undergone that process. While I was in the midst of my survey, the door opened, and a little old man, with a skull-cap of rusty black silk upon his head, entered the room. His spare stooping figure was enveloped in a dingy dressing-gown : his feet were thrust into buff leather slippers. His sharp angular features—the quick penetrating, but suspicious glances of his eyes—the knitting of the brows—and the compression of the lips denoted every trait of his character. Love, of gold—pinching parsimony—miserly greed, hardness of heart, shrewd cunning—and thorough worldly mindedness, were as legibly written on that face as in the page of a book. He bowed very slightly ; and without asking me to take a seat—for I had remained standing—looked at me as much as to imply that he awaited the explanation of my business and that his time was precious.

"I may perhaps detain you, sir," I began, in a tone of firm confidence, "for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour ; but I hope and think that when I take my departure, you will have reason to congratulate yourself that you have accorded me so much patience."

"But are you sure, ma'am," he asked, in a screeching, disagreeable voice, while his sinister, searching, speaking eyes were

fixed upon me, "that you have made no mistake, and that I am the right person ?"

"I am sure of it," I answered, "if I have the honour of addressing myself to Mr. Obadiah Seymour."

"That is my name," was the old man's quick business—like response "Perhaps you will sit down."

"Yes—if you will also be seated," I said : "for we must converse without restraint."

Again his eyes were fastened upon me in their peculiar searching manner : while the old man took a chair exactly opposite to the one in which I seated myself.

"What would you say to me, Mr. Seymour," I asked, meeting that gaze steadily and unflinchingly, if I had it in my power to save you the loss of a very considerable sum of money ?"

"Ah!" ejaculated the old man—and now his eyes twinkled with an uneasy gleaming, loss of money did you say ?" and by his look and manner I have no doubt he in a few swift brief moments cast a survey over all his pecuniary transactions, so as to anticipate the point amongst them all on which I was about to settle his attention.

"Yes—I can save you from an immense loss," I continued. "I have no doubt of it !"

"Indeed, ma'am, I do not for a moment mistrust you," said Mr. Seymour, trembling nervously, you speak as if you were serious—But where—how—what—"

Have a little patience, sir," I interjected : the loss cannot possibly take place while we are conversing ; and therefore no time will be lost. I believe your transactions are very large ?"

Some of them," rejoined Obadiah Seymour. "I never lend more than a hundred thousand pounds—never less than two hundred pounds. But what—"

I shall come to the point presently," I again interrupted. Suppose that I could save you from the loss of many thousands of pounds or at all events from the risk of losing them—if, in a word, I could give such information as would render you perfectly safe—"

"Ah, dear me! what would I say? what would I do?" ejaculated the miser, his nervous trepidation increasing. "Don't you think—don't you think you had better leave it to my—my—generosity?"

"Oh! understand me well, my dear sir," I exclaimed: "I am making the matter quite a business one."

"Ah! well, then, I suppose we must strike a bargain. What shall we say? You shall have your commission upon all you save me. Shall it be an eighth per cent.—Come, come! we will say a quarter per cent."

"Nothing of the sort, Mr. Seymour."

"Ah!" gasped the old man, as if parting from life itself: "we will say—we will say, one per cent. There, ma'am! will that suit you? Only think! one per cent, on *many, many thousands of pounds!*" he added, emphasizing my own words which he repeated.

"Now, I will be candid with you Mr. Seymour." I said, "and avoid further circumlocution."

"Ah, ma'am!" he interrupted me, "you ladies are sometimes more difficult to deal with than gentlemen. But I stick to the one per cent.; and if the sum is very, *very* large, I don't mind adding a bonus—you understand me, ma'am—a bonus of—of—a five pound note!" and then he

looked me very hard in the face with his disagreeable speaking eyes, as if to impress upon me the magnitude of his generosity.

"Mr. Seymour," I answered, "I do not require any pecuniary recompense at all."

"Dear me, ma'am! Then what *do* you require?" he cried, now surveying me with mingled suspicion and astonishment. "What am I to think? You want a recompense—but you won't take money. 'Ah, I understand,' he exclaimed, his countenance suddenly brightening up: "you expect a present! To be sure! a present—a very handsome present? Oh, leave it to me! I know what trinkets are fitted for young ladies: earrings—necklaces—perhaps a gold watch—"

"You see, sir," I said opening my shawl, "that I possess all these. You are still very wide of the mark."

"Good heavens, ma'am!" almost shrieked forth the little old gentleman, spring up from his seat: "you don't want a husband—do you? I have discounted a thousand bills in my time—have had countless money transaction—but never negotiated on such terms in my life. I—I—ma'am—do not think of marrying again—although really if I could be tempted a beautiful young lady like you—But how much money, did you say, it was that you could save me from losing—because that might be a consideration."

I could scarcely prevent myself from bursting out into the merriest peal of laughter at Obadiah Seymour's ludicrous mistake: but I contented myself with a smile, as I said, "I mean nothing of all this. You had better grant me your patience, while I explain."

"This is most singular!" muttered the old man to himself, but

in an audible voice, as he resumed his seat.

"A lady who neither wants money, nor a husband, nor yet presents—"

"Mr. Seymour," I went on to say "pray don't interrupt me any more—but listen. These are the plain facts. I can save you from the loss of an enormous sum of money—or at least I can prevent you from risking the loss. I crave a reward: but it is not either of those recompenses which you have detailed. Neither is the boon which I seek at your hands to be conferred upon myself. It is for another that I am interceding—"

"Interceding?" echoed the old man. "Not for that swindler Sir Frederick Roebuck, whom I sent to the Bench yesterday?—nor for those rascals Twister and Yarnley, that I struck a docket against this morning?"

"You see, Mr. Seymour, you *will* interrupt me," I exclaimed. "No, sir—it is not for those persons, with whom I am utterly unacquainted. But I am interceding for some one" and then I added impressively, "I am interceding on behalf of a penitent and wretched daughter, who implores permission to fling herself at her father's feet."

"Well ma'am," cried the old man at once, "there's no harm, you know, in her flinging herself at my feet if you forego your percentage."

"Yes, sir: but what I stipulate for, is that you forgive her—that you solemnly pronounce her pardon in my presence—or alone, if you prefer it—that you receive her back to your house—that you bury the past in oblivion—"

"How many thousand pounds can you save me?" demanded the miser eagerly.

"Many, many," I responded, determined not to specify the precise sum, lest it should at once afford him a clue to the nature of the transaction against which I sought to shield him: for if he were thus allowed to penetrate my secret, he might turn round and refuse the boon I required."

"Is it twenty thousand?" he asked. "Thirty? Forty? Fifty? Sixty? Seventy?"

"Ask me no more," I interrupted him, having nodded my head in the affirmative to every sum he had named. "Now, sir, what is your decision? Let me assure you that your daughter, the unfortunate Caroline—"

"Refused the best marriage that ever a parent was bent upon in behalf of his child!" cried the old man bitterly. "Shaw's father is dead—and Shaw himself is now worth a quarter of a million, if he's worth a farthing. Ah, he is a very warm man—a very warm man!"

"Never mind all that," I said: "let us revert to the previous topic. Your unhappy daughter, sir, has been terribly punished: she is proportionately repentant. A few days back, when you returned her letter unopened, she was starving—"

"Starving?" murmured Obadiah Seymour, evidently somewhat touched. "No, no—you don't exactly mean that?"

"But I do mean it!" I exclaimed emphatically: "she was starving! My God, if I could tell you all— But no! I will not. Oh, sir, for your daughter's sake, if not for that of the paltry lucre, from the loss of which I can save you—"

"But the woman who came with the letter," said the old man, "did not send in word that Caroline was starving—or I might have—yes,

I might have—yes, yes—I would have sent her a loaf.”

“Doubtless you loved your deceased wife, Mr. Seymour,” I urged. “Oh! if that wife were alive, she would not refuse the appeal of one beseeching her to take back a penitent and deeply afflicted daughter to her arms!”

“Women, you see, are weak—but we men—Starving, did you say?”—and the old man’s mind was evidently dwelling upon that dreadful word—or rather that dreadful *fact*, more feelingly than I could ever have anticipated.

“Yes, sir—starving!” I repeated: “and she will die in desperation—she will perish as a suicide, unless you take her back to your arms. Oh! Mr. Seymour! if the lifeless corpse of your own and only child were brought to your door, what would be your emotions—what your feelings?”

“True—very true,” he said: and his eyes glistened for a moment as if tears were about to stand in them: but the hard worldly-minded man kept them back, though not without a visible effort: and then he said, “But this money, ma’am—if I consent to take my daughter home—”

“And receive her as your daughter!”

“Yes—if she comes, I will receive her. I—I——” and after another visible effort, he gasped forth, “I will forgive her!”

“May I trust you? If I tell you everything now, in respect to this pecuniary business, may I depart with the conviction that your word will not be recalled?”

“Ma’am,” said the old miser, almost proudly, “It is evident that you know little of Obadiah Seymour, if you cannot trust his word. That word is as good as his bond. But I forgot—you said it was a pure business transaction. I will

give it to you in writing—No, ma’am, no writing is necessary!” he ejaculated with sudden vehemence. “My daughter is starving!” and unable any longer to restrain his emotions, he turned aside—but not so quick as to prevent me from catching a glimpse of the tears upon his cheeks.

The spectacle of this old miser’s grief sent joy to my soul. To think that such a heart as his had been thus touched, was to acquire the certainty that his word would indeed be kept, and that his daughter would be forgiven.

As if reading my thoughts, Obadiah Seymour slowly turned round, and said, “Madam, Caroline is pardoned. On my soul, I will overlook the past!”

“A thousand thanks, Mr. Seymour!” I exclaimed in a voice of exultation: and I experienced all the delight of having performed a good action. The tears streamed from my eyes, as the voice of prayer went silently up from the depths of my soul, imploring that what I had thus done might be set down on the bright page of my account in the register of Heaven’s Chancery.

“Yes, ma’am,” resumed the old miser, speedily recovering his composure, “I have pardoned my daughter: the pledge is an obligation as sacred as my name on the back of a bill. And now,” he continued, the firmness with which he had spoken those words, yielding to a fresh fit of nervousness, “for your promised explanations.”

“Mr. Seymour,” I responded, “accident brought to my knowledge that you were yesterday applied to for the loan of one hundred thousand pounds—”

“Ah, to be sure!” he cried “But you don’t mean to say that it

is to this transaction you allude? Why, the security is excellent. Mr Rockingham is a gentleman of large estates——"

"All of which are mortgaged," I rejoined emphatically.

"Mortgaged, ma'am?" almost shrieked forth the old miser, "and I who promised to advance the money to-morrow! Heavens, what an escape! It would have killed me! it would have killed me! a hundred thousand pounds!" and he quivered all over with as much nervous trepidation as if just snatched back by some friendly hand from the brink of a precipice up to which he had advanced in unconscious reverie.

"The estates are mortgaged, sir," I continued. "Mr. Fleming, a solicitor——"

"Fleming? I know him well," exclaimed Seymour. "He lives in Bush Lane—a highly respectable man——"

"Well, Mr. Seymour, if you apply to this gentleman, he will give you all the particulars. Mr. Rockingham is indeed a ruined man: he is indebted to Mr. Fleming's clients in the enormous amount of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds: but it appears they had agreed to give him time for fifty thousand and postpone the sale of his estates, if he could find one hundred thousand."

"I should have been robbed," screamed out the old man, "as completely as if by Dick Turpin on the high-way. The scoundrel to come to me of all people in the world! Two or three years ago I advanced his son—Horace I think his name was—a few hundreds; and they were faithfully paid back. I thought Mr. Rockingham was a rich man. Of course I was to have two securities: but they were more nominal than real—One hundred thousand

pounds—it would have killed me!"

"You need not excite yourself any longer on that account, Mr. Seymour: for you are saved the loss."

"Ah! my dear madam, how can I sufficiently thank you?" said the usurer, still in a voice that was trembling with nervousness. If I had a hundred daughters, I would forgive them to your sake. But I—I must—yes, you really must let me send you a little present—such a thing as a—a pencil-case.

"Nothing, Mr. Seymour," I answered emphatically."

"Well, ma'am I sha'n't attempt to force your inclinations. You are very good. Perhaps you will take a biscuit—and a—a—glass of wine. Not that I have got a bottle drawn: but for you——"

"No, I thank you, sir," I interrupted him. "There is still something else which I have to communicate. You spoke ere now of Mr. Rockingham's son, Horace. That young man, Mr. Seymour, is the villain who seduced your daughter."

"What! that boy—that mere child—that girlish-looking stripling?" shrieked forth the old man, in amazement."

"That girlish-looking stripling, as you denominate him," I answered, "possesses the passions of a fiend—the capacity for mischief which would render him a worthy Lieutenant for Lucifer himself. Your daughter has told me her tale——"

"Poor creature! and she was starving?" murmured the old miser, his mind still harping on the same string. And no wonder!—for if the human heart be susceptible, at all—if it be capable of vibrating with a single compassionating emotion—it must be when that horrible,

frightful, hideously expressive word "*starving*" smites the ear.

"I now hasten, Mr. Seymour, to bear the good tidings to your daughter. Perhaps I may accompany her in the course of the day: or perhaps I may not bring her hither until to-morrow. For she is ill and suffering—"

"Let her come to-day," said the old man. "Shall I—shall I go with you?"

"No: you had better leave me to break the happy intelligence to her."

"Well, well, have it all your own way. You would make a capital woman of business. You— you ought to be a discounteer: you would make such capital terms! I shall go now and order my clerk to write a very brief note to Mr. Rockingham to say that I decline the transaction. Shall I tell him the motives?"

"Most certainly!" I ejaculated.

"Tell him that his son was the seducer of your daughter, and that he himself endeavoured to dupe and deceive you in this money business."

"I will," responded the old man. "One hundred thousand pounds! If Jack Sheppard was alive he could not have attempted a more bare-faced robbery. It would have killed me!"

I took my leave of the miser, and re-entered the hackney-coach, my heart exultant at the success of my enterprise. I had not chosen that he should accompany me, because I did not wish him to learn that his daughter had been driven to an attempt at suicide. *That* incident, which had so well nigh been the crowning one of her sad career, was much better buried in secrecy. The hackney-coach appeared to advance at a snail's pace; every stoppage in the great thorough-

fares of the City, filled me with a burning impatience; I could have leapt out and walked: I could have run—I could have flown, to bear poor Caroline the joyous tidings which I had to impart. I thought the journey would never have ended. At length the coach drew up in the front of the coffee-house; and when the door of the private dwelling was opened, I could scarcely prevent myself from rushing up-stairs at the height of my speed. But I was fearful lest a too sudden shock—even of joy—might produce an evil effect; and I ascended slowly. Yet notwithstanding all my precautions, the success of my enterprise was reflected in my countenance: for the moment I entered the chamber, Caroline exclaimed. "Thank God!" in a tone which convinced me at once she read her father's decision in my looks:—and she fainted.

I was not long in recovering her; and when she came back to consciousness, she flung her arms round my neck—she embraced me—she poured forth her gratitude in expressions of the most fervid enthusiasm—she vowed that she would ever cherish for me a sister's love. When she grew calm, I related to her the particulars of my interview with her father—at least so far as it was at all necessary to explain them—and quite enough to convince her that his forgiveness was genuine, sincere, and even in a measure independent of the service which I had rendered him in respect to the Rockinghams.

"Oh, my dearest Miss Lambert!" murmured Caroline, "this is the happiest moment I have known for a long, long time! To be restored to the home, which I never should have left—Ah!" she

ejaculated suddenly: "and to think too that vengeance has been wreaked at the same time—it is almost more than I can put faith in! It appears a dream."

After some little farther conversation, I said, "Do you think, Caroline, that you are well enough to be removed this day to your father's house? It is now past four o'clock in the afternoon," I added, looking at my watch. "Would it not be better for you to wait until to-morrow?"

"No," she exclaimed: "you cannot fancy with what strength I am now nerved. Oh, yes! I am inspired with the energy of a thousand. Let me go at once; and you shall accompany me. But perhaps I am occupying your time?"

"No," I answered: "I have ample leisure to devote to you. I will accompany you to your father's house at once."

I quitted the room to inquire of the landlady whether Miss Seymour's clothes had been dried and were in a fitting condition for her to wear. It was only necessary to procure another bonnet, shoes, and other little articles—and these were speedily obtained. Caroline had not misjudged her strength: she was indeed inspired with an energy which was almost miraculous after everything she had gone through. She was soon dressed: I remunerated the people of the house liberally; and by six o'clock I was on my way with Caroline towards Broad-street. As we drew near our destination, she trembled nervously: she showed me the spot where she had halted on the preceding night when on her way to lay herself down at her father's threshold—that threshold over which she was now on the point of being received again! In a few

minutes more the coach stopped in front of the house: and at that very minute, the front door opening, who should hasten forth but Mr. Rockingham and his son Horace?

Mr. Rockingham, senior, was a little above the middle stature—strongly built without being inclined to corpulency. His countenance had naturally a look half severe, half self-sufficient, with a certain tincture of ignobility and meanness derived from the many slimy ways by which he had amassed the fortune that was now scattered to the winds. But at the present moment, as he issued forth from the miser's house, his features were ghastly pale, with the anguish of despair upon them. The word—that awful word "RUIN" was written upon those features as legibly as if seared there with red-hot iron. And Horace—his countenance, naturally so beautiful, was distorted with every agonizing and evil passion. The father and son were not speaking a word to each other as they descended the door-steps. The former appeared to walk as if in a dream—or rather under the influence of a terrific nightmare: he did not seem to notice the vehicle—but passed hastily on. Horace did observe it; he caught sight of my countenance—but not immediately of Caroline's for she was leaning back with a faintness that had come over her. Horace started for an instant on thus encountering my looks; and the light flamed up in his eyes, not, merely with a sinister expression but with a fiendish glare. He walked straight up to the coach; and on looking in at the window, again started on beholding Caroline. The appearance of his countenance at that window called her back to full vitality in

a moment : but she did not speak a word. The look however which she threw on Horace, convinced me that whatsoever love she had formerly cherished for him, had indeed turned into the blackest hate.

"Ah! then, it is you, Rosa, who have done this?" he said in a low voice—but a voice, Oh! so altered from its natural expression, that instead of being soft and full of masculine harmony, it was thick and hoarse; his eyes too glared upon me with a horrible lustre, and every lineament of his naturally beautiful face was distorted into hideousness. "Yes—it is you who have done this," he continued: "but rest assured that though I may be beggared along with my father, I will yet wreck the bitterest vengeance upon your head."

The mocking laugh of mingled triumph and defiance which sounded from my lips, must have reached his ears, notwithstanding the abruptness with which he turned away from the chaise window and hurried off.

"I am glad that this has happened," whispered Caroline to me. "It has given me the strength and energy which were failing."

All that I have described was the work of a few moments; and Horace had passed away ere the coachman had descended from his seat. He opened the door: that of the house still remained open—for the female servant, seeing a coach stop, had carried on the threshold. She had evidently learnt, too, from her master that his daughter was forgiven and might soon be expected home again: for when Caroline, leaning on my arm, ascended the steps, the domestic spoke some words of congratulation. We passed into that same parlour

where my interview had taken place with the old miser; and in a few moments Caroline—first throwing herself at her father's feet was raised up by him and clasped in his arms.

I will not linger upon this—but will content myself with observing that Mr. Seymour displayed as much feeling as it was in nature to exhibit: methought however that he really felt more than appeared upon the surface. At all events his forgiveness was sincere; and when the first excitement of this meeting was over, he said, "Now, Caroline, never must a word of the past escape from the lips of either of us!"

The happy daughter embraced her father again; then she strained me to her bosom; and the old man, taking my hand, shook it with a considerable degree of warmth. He went so far as to insist that I should remain to pass the evening and spoke more emphatically than he had done in the afternoon, about a glass of wine. But I declared that I must now get back to my own home as speedily as possible. Before however I took my departure, I seized an opportunity while Mr. Seymour had quitted the room for a few minutes to send off a business letter—to address Caroline in the following terms:—

"It is evident from the reception your father has just given me, that he knows not who I am. Doubtless he forbore from mentioning to the Rockinghams his authority for the intelligence he had received: and indeed this much was evident from the words which Horace addressed to me at the coach-window. It was only the coincidence of my appearance at the moment that sent the conviction flashing to the young fiend's mind that I

was the authoress of all this. Caroline, you will not expect to see me here again. No—do not interrupt me: but listen. Yow are now restored to the paternal home; you may to some extent retrieve the past—Would to heaven that I had a similar opportunity! But your own good sense will tell you, Caroline," I went on to observe in a quicker voice, so as to keep down the emotions which were swelling up in my heart,—“your own good sense will tell you that I must not—I ought not—I dare not continue to visit you. Farewell then my dear Caroline—and may you now be happy!",

She threw her arms round my neck—embraced me with tears in her eyes—conjured me to reconsider my resolution and come to see her occasionally—and vowed that her gratitude should only cease with her life. I hastened from the room; and meeting the old usurer in the hall, took my leave of him likewise. During the ride homeward, I could not help thinking most seriously of all that had occurred since the preceding evening: for there was much in those incidents, as well as in the narrative which I had received from Caroline Seymour's lips, to conjure up the most solemn reflections. The direful consequences to which frailty may lead, had been painfully developed to my view, I shuddered as I thought of the miseries and privations endured by that young and beautiful creature—who was of my own age—and of that dread scene at the bridge in which her life had all but closed. These meditations became too much for me; and scalding tears ran down my cheeks.

In order to divert my thoughts into another channel, I fixed my

mental vision on the spectacle of Mr. Rockingham and his son coming forth from the miser's house with despair in their hearts and ruin imprinted on their countenances. The father had ever deported himself haughtily and proudly towards my family; and he had refused a trifling succour when our need was the greatest. I had therefore no sympathy for him. And if none for *him*, what commiseration could I have experienced for his son? I, who had striven to be virtuous—I, who loved virtue for virtue's sake—I, whose principles were naturally so good that countless piles of gold placed before my eyes would not have tempted me astray—I, it was, nevertheless, who had become under the pressure of terrific circumstances, the victim of that fiend in angel shape! It was for *this* that I gloated over the revenge, I had again wreaked upon him. I could have forgiven him, almost cheerfully, the demonstrations of his own malignity against myself, and assuredly, if his conduct had been limited to these, I should never have travelled out of my way to accelerate his father's ruin and his own. But it was the *one* tremendous crime he had perpetrated, which inspired me with a vengeance that was so implacable: and I said to myself as I journeyed homeward, after taking leave of Caroline, “I may be brought down to miseries, privations and distresses—I may become houseless, friendless, and foodless; but at all events I will never lose sight of an opportunity to reduce my destroyer to the same abject condition. Even if my own career should terminate in a catastrophe similar to that which Caroline voluntarily sought, but only more fatal in its result—I

should take the final plunge resignedly if I knew that I left Horace Rockingham in the world, likewise homeless, friendless, foodless! Forgiveness for all other enemies—but pardon for him never!”

I reached my house in Sloane Street, wearied almost to exhaustion with the incidents of that busy day. Captain Fortescue being on guard, I had to drive alone and I proposed to retire to bed early with the hope of obtaining a good night's rest. As there was no man-servant in the house, I had been in the habit of having all the keys brought up to me the last thing—the incident of the burglary at Mrs. Harborough's in Jermyn Street having rendered me cautious. Accordingly, at about ten o'clock, I rang the bell to intimate that I was about to retire,—when Frances, who answered the summons instead of the housemaid (whose place it was to do so), said that the servants were not ready to withdraw as yet. I inquired the reason; and Frances, who was a very good, attentive, and well-behaved girl—but who nevertheless made some little attempt to screen a fellow-servant—informed me, after a few minutes' hesitation and cross-questioning, that Margaret the housemaid had gone out and had not yet returned. I was somewhat annoyed that she should thus have issued forth without my permission: but supposing that her absence would not be prolonged, I said that I would sit up until her return; for tired though I was, I did not choose to seek my own chamber until I knew the house was properly secured and shut up.

I again fell into meditations on recent incidents; and thus for

some while I did not notice how time was passing. The *pendule* on the mantel announcing eleven with its silver tongue, startled me from my reverie. Again I rang the bell; Frances replied to the summons: Margaret had not yet come in. I was still resolved to sit up; and, to be brief, it was past midnight when the housemaid returned. I was exceedingly angry, and desired Frances to order her to come up to me immediately that she might give an account of her conduct. But instead of obeying, Margaret flaunted up to her own chamber; and as she passed the drawing-room, the door of which happened to be ajar, she gave vent to some insolent observation, evidently intended for my ears, but the full meaning of which I could not catch. I said nothing then, but resolved to dismiss her in the morning—a step which I had all the less compunction in taking, inasmuch as I may say, without vanity, that I was in the habit of treating my servants, with kindness and therefore merited a better return than this.

I arose at my usual hour! Frances came as was her wont to assist in my toilet. She had occasion to leave the room to fetch something that I required; and on her return, she intimated that Margaret wished to speak to me at once.

“I am afraid, ma'am,” added Frances, “that she is inclined to be rather impertinent; and I should be sorry to see you put out and vexed.”

“Let her come up,” I answered; “and you remain below until I ring.”

I was at the time seated in front of a *psyche*, arranging my hair. In a few moments Margaret entered the room; and I at once saw

that she was armed with a sort of cool insolence, mingled with an air of defiance.

"You wish to speak to me?" I said, surveying her with a firm look.

"To be sure I do!" she exclaimed; "because I know very well that you meant to say something to me: and the sooner we have it out the better."

"Here are the wages which are due to you," I said; "and you can leave my service at once."

"That's just what I meant to do!" she cried, working herself up into a rage. "A pretty thing indeed, if a servant can't go out for an hour or two, without your tearing at the bells and sitting up to watch when she comes home! I suppose you think that I am preciously grieved at leaving without a character? but it isn't to such as you that respectable people will apply for references. A pretty thing indeed," she repeated, "that you may amuse yourself just as you like, and yet grudge your servants the least recreation!"

"Leave the room directly, Margaret," I said, "and the house as soon as your boxes are ready."

"As for leaving the house," she exclaimed, "I shall be only too glad to get out of such a disreputable place; but as for leaving the room, I sha'n't do it till I've told you my mind. A pretty creature you are to give yourself such airs! Pray, who are you?" she demanded, assuming an insolent attitude and placing her hand upon her hip. "A kept mistress—a pensioned harlot—"

"Margaret, begone! I ejaculated my countenance becoming crimson, and my whole form burning with mingled shame and indignation.

"I sha'n't till I like!" she replied in a menacing manner. "I am an honest young woman, and well conducted too; and I am ashamed of myself for having come into such service. There's corruption in it! Cook says so too; and she means to leave. As for that sentimental hypocrite Frances, I dare say you will make her as bad as yourself before long—"

"Margaret," I exclaimed, "leave this room directly!" and I sprang up from my seat.

"Well, and what will you do if I don't choose to obey?" she cried, with an impudent leer. "You give yourself all the airs of a fine lady, and you are only the scum of the earth. Look at yourself in the glass! You are very beautiful, no doubt; but you sell yourself for every morsel of bread you eat—for the dress you put on—for the servants that wait upon you—for the house you live in—for the carriage you ride in! And what will it all come to? How does it all end with women of your description? You come down to the streets at last—you flaunt it for a time there—and then you die in the workhouse or on a dunghill, or else with a leap from Waterloo Bridge."

No pen can do justice to the state of my feelings as I was compelled to listen to this bitter tirade, — all the more bitter because, notwithstanding the malignity which prompted, and the coarse insolence which characterized it, every syllable seemed fraught with a terribly prophetic truth. My cheeks were burning at first: then they became pale as death. I sank down upon the chair, and literally cowered under the mockingly contemptuous looks and taunting words of that low creature. I was completely in her power. My own frailty placed formidable weapons

in her hand: my own guilty position rendered the attitude which she assumed a perfect tower of strength. I could have flown at her with the fury of a tigress; but I dared not—no, dared not; and, therefore, impotent in every point, I cowered, and shivered, and shook in her presence. But when, those last words smote my ear—words which, though evidently thrown out as mere random shots brought so vividly back to my recollection the horrible scene of Waterloo Bridge, a shriek—faint and half stifled, but full of anguish—came from my lips.

"Ah! I have touched you, have I?" cried Margaret, who seemed at the moment to be inspired with a demoniac malignity. "Well, so much the better. Perhaps you are going down hill a little faster than you think. Those whom certain matters most concern are often the last to hear of them; and so perhaps you don't know that your friend, or protector, or keeper, or whatever you call him," she added, with a contemptuous sneer, "is over head and ears in debt, and there will be a smash soon."

With these words she turned abruptly away: and flounced out of the chamber, leaving the door wide open. I hastened to shut it: I turned the key in the lock: and flinging myself upon a sofa, gave way to all the bitter anguish that filled my bosom. Taunts the most goading—predictions the most terrible—insults the most intolerable, had been wound up by an announcement that was all but overwhelming. I was in that state of mind when fancy adopts the worst as something certain, instead of seeking to hope for the best. If that intelligence were true, and Reginald was ruining himself for me,—Oh, what

ineffable agony of mind should I endure! At length I became somewhat calmer; and I said to myself that I was wrong to allow the insolence of a vile ungrateful woman to produce such an effect upon me. But the effect had been produced; and I could not conquer it. Within comparatively a few hours I had been stricken a serious of blows, all having the fearfully solemn aspect of warnings. Caroline's narrative, and every thing that concerned her, seemed not merely to belong to herself alone but to be typical of the career of every female who strays from the path of virtue,—with this lamentable distinction, that whereas she was ultimately received across the paternal threshold again, the same happy rescue from misery and distress might be the fortunate lot of none others. And then, too, came all the terrible predictions which Margaret had uttered—Oh! it seemed as if heaven in a variety of ways was pouring forth omens and warnings around me!

I was very dull and low-spirited the whole morning, until Reginald Fortescue made his appearance. In the meantime Margaret had taken her departure; and Frances by her looks showed that she knew what had taken place and that she sincerely commiserated me. I longed to ask her what were the grounds on which Margaret had spoken so confidently of Captain Fortescue's pecuniary affairs: but I did not consider it delicate or becoming to enter upon such a subject. It was about one o'clock when Reginald made his appearance; and as he immediately saw that something was the matter with me, I candidly told him all that had taken place in respect to the discharged house-

maid. Then in his countenance I beheld, alas! the confirmation of my worst fears!

"To tell you the truth, dearest Rose," he said, finding that it was useless to conceal his position from me any longer, "I am a little troubled in certain quarters—because my father has diminished the supplies. When he was in London three or four weeks back, he insisted I should obtain leave of absence and pay him my usual visit: but I could not bear to separate from you. He went away in anger; and that was the reason of his abrupt departure from London. You must not be angry because I did not tell you all this before."

"No, my dear Reginald," I answered; "I am not angry. On the contrary, I am bound to regard your silence as a proof of affection. You would not willingly inflict pain upon me; your conduct has been most generous, most noble—most self-sacrificing: and mine shall now be equally so. Reginald," I added in a firm voice, though heaven knows my heart was lacerated as I spoke, "we must separate."

"Separate, Rose?" he cried, in perfect consternation: "and we have not been three months together! No, no—it is impossible! I will make any sacrifice sooner than part from you. It is not you who have got me into debt. I was much encumbered before I ever knew you; and I have not dared tell my father the extent of my liabilities. Rose, here on my knees I conjure you not to leave me! I love you—you knew that I love you! I have been wild and reckless—dissipated—and even debauched: this is the first serious passion I have ever known—and it is a lasting one! In heaven's name do not

snap the bounds which bind us to each other!"

What could I say? what could I do? Reginald was kneeling at my feet,—his handsome countenance upturned towards me with a look of so much tender entreaty that I had not the heart to perform what I nevertheless felt to be my duty. I flung my arms around his neck: he strained me to his breast, exclaiming, "Ah, this is an assurance, Rose, that you will not again speak to me of separation!"

Scarcely had we grown somewhat calm after this little scene—and scarcely had Reginald begun to tell me of some plan which he was about to adopt in order to raise money—when Frances entered the drawing room, to say that a person desired to speak to Captain Fortescue.

"What sort of a person?" inquired Reginald, with a sudden start of uneasiness.

"Here he is, sir," responded Frances, who started in her turn on finding that the individual had followed her, hitherto unperceived, up to the room-door.

The man entered; and his appearance at once made Reginald turn pale,—so that on my part, without precisely comprehending the nature of the calamity which was about to explode I was seized with a vague terror.

"You can retire: young woman," said the man, addressing himself to Frances. "I just want a word or two with your master."

The maid, flinging a glance of sympathy upon me, left the apartment; and as the door closed behind her, Reginald said in a whispering voice, but in a nervously excited manner, as he took my hand and pressed it violently, "For heaven's sake, conquer your feelings. Rose!—keep

up your courage—he of good spirits—all will yet end well. This person is a sheriff's-officer—and I know wherefore he comes”

“A sheriff's-officer?” I echoed, in a dying tone: for now the horrible conviction smote upon my mind that he whom I loved was about to be borne to prison.

“Well, Captain Fortescue,” said the officer, who seemed anxious to do his work as civilly as possible, “I am sorry to have been obliged to come here: but I didn't like to take you while on guard yesterday. I went to your lodgings in Pall Mall just now—but did not find you there; and as my orders are positive, I was obliged to come down to Solane Street. Beg pardon, ma'am,” he continued, turning to me, and making a bow; “but these little accidents do happen to young gentlemen now and then—and I dare say the Captain will soon settle his affairs. Of course, sir, you will come quiet; and so I won't have my man into the house.”

Thus speaking, the officer advanced to the window and made a sign, doubtless to his adjunct who had waited in the street. Meanwhile Reginald continued whispering in my ear all the cheering and reassuring things he could possibly think of; and for his sake I endeavoured to assume an outward calmness, though inwardly I was well nigh distracted. He told me that he must go away with the officer to the lock-up house—that he would at once take measures to sell his commission, in order to emancipate himself—and that in a few days he should be restored to freedom, I besought him to write to his father: but he positively, and even vehemently, refused to

adopt this course:—he doubtless well knew that the only conditions on which Sir Reginald would come to his succour, must be based on the complete and solemnly pledged separation from myself. I spoke of my jewels, my dimonds, and all my valuables, as the means of raising money to liquidate the debt for which he was arrested: but, alas! it amounted to more than two thousand pounds—and between us both, we had not sufficient personal property whereby to procure such a sum. Besides, Reginald declared that he would sooner go to gaol and remain there eternally, than suffer me to part with a single thing which I possessed. I besought him to allow me to share his imprisonment:—deeply, deeply anxious was I to make a fitting return for all the proofs of sincere affection which he demonstrated towards me.

The officer, overhearing a portion of our discourse, said that there was not the least objection against my accompanying Captain Fortescue to the lock-up house in Chancery Lane to which he was about to be conducted; but he hinted that I could only remain there for certain hours in the day, and not altogether. This permission, qualified though it were, was a relief to my mind; and a hackney-coach being procured, we quitted the house. I told Frances to keep the circumstances as secret as possible—adding that I should be back in the evening. The poor girl, who really loved me, wept as she saw me preparing to accompany my protector to a spunging-house; and she promised faithfully to attend to my instructions. The dingy-looking head-quarters of the sheriff's officer were reached: the dismal interior was entered:

and methought that my heart would burst when I beheld the iron bars to the windows of the room to which we were conducted. Reginald endeavoured to assume a cheerful demeanour; and we mutually did all we could to keep up our spirits. He sent off at once for some man of business, to whom he gave instructions for the sale of his commission; and again were my entreaties that he would pause and reflect, fruitlessly offerred up. When I returned to Sloane Street in the evening, the house seemed as lonely as if it were a desert; and my pillow was that night moistened with my tears.

A week passed away, during which Reginald remained at the lock-up house; and I passed the greater portion of every day with him. He continually assured me that he was consoled and cheered by the proofs of devoted love which I afforded him; and frequently, as he strained me in his arms, did he declare that he would sooner make any sacrifice than consent to separate from me. He even endeavoured to lead me into solemn vows and pledges to the effect that under no circumstances would I consent to part from him; but these I would not abandon myself, even in

moments of melting tenderness. During this week the arrangements progressed for the sale of Reginald's commission: but unfortunately detainers for other debts were lodged against him: and this circumstance he could not keep from me. The amount to be expected from the commission was not near sufficient to meet all those liabilities: but Reginald buoyed himself up with the hope that his creditors, by receiving part of their due would give him time for the remainder.—so that he should still be enabled to accomplish his release. I was too little acquainted with matters of this description to estimate the feasibility of these plans: I nevertheless had certain misgivings which I could not subdue, though I strove my best to conceal them.

The week of which I have spoken expired. It was my habit since Reginald's arrest, to rise very early, and breakfast by eight o' clock—so as to be with him soon after nine. One morning, just as I had hurriedly finished my meal and was about to hasten upstairs to dress, a loud double knock resounded through the house; and in a few moments Frances announced Sir Reginald Fortescue.